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MRS SPARKS OF PARIS.

BY

C.H. DAVIS. des.

A CURTIS BOND

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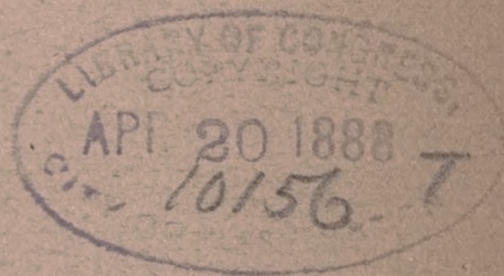
MRS. SPARKS OF PARIS

A REALISTIC NOVEL

BY ✓

A. CURTIS BOND

35-



NEW YORK
POLLARD & MOSS
42 PARK PLACE AND 37 BARCLAY STREET

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MRS. SPARKS OF PARIS.

I.

THE STUDENTS' BALL.

FROM the windows of 45, Rue de Rochefoucauld the omnibuses traveling over the breadth of Paris from the Batignolles to the Luxembourg, may be seen dragged slowly up the hill of the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette.

Rue de Rochefoucauld lives upon its memory; for a few blocks after one turns into it from the vicinity of Trinité Church, one might imagine oneself in the aristocratic neighborhood of the St. Germain: the houses are large and imposing, light stone and neat balconies, with tastefully arranged curtains at the windows of the "apartments meublé." The transition, however, is sudden and by no means agreeable; the first block ends with the

private "hotel" of a Prince, the next begins with a grocery and is succeeded by a row of as unpromising tenements as may be found in Paris. The proprietor of a bread and cake bakery on the opposite corner owns a parrot, whose resting-place is upon an unprotected perch at the door, from which the wretch screeches, "Pain, Gateau, Pain, Gateau," the livelong day.

This is some distance from the Opera House, the center for reckoning all distances, and it is no short walk up the *Chaussée d'Antin*, through the *Rue Chateaudun*, around the *Trinité*, and thus into *Rochefoucauld*.

Upon the east bank of the *Seine*, not far from the terminus of the stage route which extends up the *Lorette Hill*, is one of the well-known gardens of the city, the rendez-vous—for two francs—of all the pleasure-loving and adventure-seeking students and strangers in this Latin quarter.

Nightly the band of the *Bullier* exhausts

its programme, and the leader unceasingly turns the board that bears "Valse, Lanciers, Quadrille" upon its several sides, for when the list is exhausted it is recommenced afresh, and the slight variations in the airs is the only change that can be discovered from one week's end to another. In the lull of the music the crowds stroll about the garden and sit within the shady summer-houses at either side, or wander up to the diminutive waterfall at the further end, and beneath the artfully constructed overhanging rocks, seeming so natural in their insecure security. The walks are graveled, and settees skirt the edge of a grass plat that bears some device in growing flowers, and is watered by a tiny fountain. Budding students and adolescent maidens steal away into the half-obscured summer-houses, and the occasional provocation of a laugh, or a by no means startled feminine shriek, are about all that indicate the existence of animal life.

Strangers are readily selected, and the true Yankee capacity for assimilating his inquisitiveness with a crowd is characteristically shown in the presence of the sight-seeing New-Englander and his wife. The wife frowns upon the indelicacies of a muddy day at home, and at the Bullier she stands upon tip-toe to peer over the shoulder of some applauding Frenchman at the display of female agility in an exhilarating farandole. The husband is pronounced in his recognition of the talent of the "artistes," and when the enchantment of the display has its recess, he with his wife on his arm, seeks the fresher air of the garden—and forgets all about the gyrations and attractions of the waltz. The English woman, on the other hand, ignores the existence of such resorts, and the Englishman is by no accident misled into a smile; he objects when a particularly festive young lady disturbs the set of his hat through the agency of the tip of her slippered foot, and he mur-

murs something about outrages and police interference; he resents the perpetuation of such places; he elevates his mediæval eyebrows—and comes again the next night.

It would be very difficult, in a written description of the peculiarities of this establishment, to distinguish one night or one set of persons from another in the life of the Bullier, for so closely does each resemble its fellow in its incidents, its visitors, and its follies as to put distinction quite out of the question. Yet, if one could picture an exceptionally gay gathering, an uninterrupted shout of laughter from the first quadrille to the concluding valse, it would be an excellent mind-picture of the evening of July 14, 1880, and of the scene which greeted two young men, who, pushing aside the swinging doors at the entrance, stepped into the room from the slightly raised platform that was immediately within, and from which a view of the dancers could be had,

Both of these men were French : they had the national abbreviation of stature, the characteristic blonde beard carefully trimmed to a point, and atrociously-fitting clothes—distinctive features of the true Parisian. They gesticulated and shrugged their shoulders and twirled their canes, and wore narrow-brimmed hats, and did everything else that writers, from the time of Carlo Magno to the present, have claimed to be the particular habits and manners of the pure, unmixed and unadulterated Gaul. There was only one point apparently where they emphatically and positively departed from the tradition which story-tellers have made for their countrymen—they were in earnest, dead earnest. One of the young men was agitating his index finger in a manner that must have impressed his associate with the very essence of credulity, and the associate's face was as grave and as thoughtful as if the confusion about him was of a sombre rather than a joyful nature,

If the American fashion prevailed in France or Germany, or in any foreign country, in fact, for mankind to resolve himself into an individual sewing-circle or afternoon-tea, and strain his sense of hearing to the capacity of absorbing all that his neighbor might be telling in confidence to his friend, he might have caught chance words that would have given much food for thought and much uncertainty as to the meaning of the strange sentences.

There was quiet talk about a boy, a boy without a name it seemed, and one of the young men appeared to be wonderfully anxious to provide a pedigree for a certain youth in whom, judging from the words and the tone, he took an unparalleled interest. But the other, in an unsatisfactory way, threw out the hint that a woman whose name would be worthy of the child, might be a very difficult person to persuade into any such transaction, which, looked upon even in its most favorable light, was, at least, a questionable

one. And at this the young man became persuasive, and addressing his friend as "Doctor," impressed upon him that the discovery of this very desirable but naturally rather punctilious female, was the one duty that constituted his share of the scheme.

And then the Doctor seemed lost in thought; he soliloquized aloud, that the requirements of his friend, the Count, as he casually called him, were indeed most exacting; he insisted upon a young lady of nobility, of noble birth; she must, however, be ill—so ill, in fact, that according to his, the Doctor's, opinion, she would not survive the ceremony six months at most. Then the Doctor ceased muttering, and the Count nodded an eager approval of each proviso. The Doctor was wrapt in thought, and presently his face brightened, and he declared he knew just the party who could answer every one of the conditions named. The young girl was dying, there was no question of that—dying of consumption.

But would she consent to such a sacrifice of self-respect, even under the circumstances? Would she embitter her few remaining days by such an act? Would she sell herself, that she might pose as the legitimate mother of an illegitimate child? These queries were more than he could answer—he must question her and find out; there was one thing in his favor, one coign of vantage that he might use: the girl was poor, her father was poverty itself; it was a struggle between starving, respectability, and downright beggary. An appeal to her love for her parents, an offer to provide for their last years, might have its effect upon her scruples, and bring about the result they sought.

The Count was one of those persistent and impulsive natures that sees in every hope a certainty, and the hint of some assumed means of gratification was seized as the very assurance of success. So he told the Doctor what he might offer as inducements to

the young lady : a comfortable death ; peace, plenty, and one hundred thousand francs to leave to her father and mother. The Doctor seemed to draw inspiration from these suggestions, and promising his best efforts, he and the Count disappeared amid the crowd re-entering the ball-room.

The music was opening for a quadrille, and the fortunate possessors of front-row seats at the tables upon the elevated platform extending along one side of the room, settled themselves with a satisfactory sigh at their close proximity to the set being formed upon the floor, while the garçons smiled at the good results of the bait they had thrown out in the shape of well-arranged chairs, whose occupants would much prefer to order renewed dishes of questionable cream than to surrender their places and lose the pleasures which the frivolities and eccentricities of the dance promised them. Many unfortunates based their hopes upon the wrong set, and

when they discovered the spirits of these particular dancers were not at the altitudinous point necessary to make everything pass off satisfactorily, there was a general stampede to some other and more esthetic quartette, where the delights of the hour drowned all other considerations, and the feet of the dancers appeared hardly to touch the floor.

Again and again were these scenes repeated until musicians, participants, and audience, tired with the exertion of doing or seeing, found their way into the streets, and those who lived upon the route of an all-night "bus," went to sleep in its capacious seat until their house was reached, while those less favored walked and questioned themselves whether the sport was really worth the trip.

II.

THE DUKE AND THE DUCHESS.

THE fourth floor of the tenement at 45, Rue de Rochefoucauld is divided into three suites of apartments. The front, or larger suite, consists of two bedrooms, a parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and ante-room. The furniture, what there remains of it, shows that it had been elegant in its time and acquainted with more pretentious surroundings. The rooms are fitted with the good taste peculiar to the people—a taste that can accomplish excellent results with scanty means ; curtains and hangings shield the windows, and the doors are protected by portieres ; a monstrous chandelier of nickel and gilt, a relic, evidently, and plentifully supplied with candles, hangs over a table in the center of the parlor and constitutes the *point de resistance* of the apart-

ment; the floors are painfully clean and well polished, the ornaments conspicuously scarce.

Upon the 15th day of July, 1880, Marie, the maid, the *bonne*, who refused to leave her master and mistress when their fortune was lost, and they were reduced to the necessities of a life of poverty, was dusting the chairs and table and humming a popular air beneath her breath. The Duchesse d'Almaby had gone out quite early, to make some purchases for the day's necessities, and the Duke had followed her, hoping, as he had hoped for months, that something would occur to better his condition.

A ring at the bell put an end to Marie's singing, and she threw her dusting-cloth behind the curtain as she hastened to admit the baker's boy, whom she imagined might be one of the Princes her master had at some time known, and who had finally come to pay his respects and leave a substantial remem-

brance ; for Marie, be it understood, with the true shift of the grisette, had no pride above accepting a means of avoiding starvation, and was often tempted to find fault with the Duke for his conceit, as she termed it, in the same direction.

But it was not a Prince ; the stolid countenance of the baker's boy had nothing of the aristocracy in it and Marie expressed the disappointment she felt as she turned back to her dusting, with the injunction to the youth to lay his rolls on the dining-table. The only reply of the boy was a grin, a leer, a mocking chuckle, as he told Marie he had no rolls, no bread, nothing for the Duke—how he rolled that title on his tongue like a young Robespierre,—nothing—except a bill. A bill for ten francs ; think of it as he did ! Mon Dieu, what a sum to him ; it represented several weeks' hard work—that is, a boy's hard work—climbing stairs, gibing the servants, making faces at the concierge ; it represented good,

solid enjoyment at the theaters that he longed for, but could never participate in, for he never hoped to have ten francs ; he mechanically took a few sous from his pocket and studied them, and then he brought out a centime or so—those provincial pieces that indicate the very depth of French picayunishness ; to him the sum was extreme, and he felt justified by the magnitude of the amount in intimating that his master was not established in business for the purpose of supporting impecunious nobility, and he went further, and perhaps a little out of his way, to insinuate something against the Duke's intention, as well as his ability, so far as a question of settlement was concerned.

Now, Marie had toiled upon promises for many years ; the assurance of diamond earrings upon her next birthday, had been received with as honest and sincere thanks as if they had been handed her in the very flesh itself ; she had toiled for love—she knew the

Duchesse would pay her if she could ; she believed the Duke would one day be able to do so ; occasionally she rebelled at her master's inactivity, and his principle that the last of a royal line should live without labor, come what might, and she thought it was carrying pride rather beyond the bounds of reason when he, returning home one day with a Napoleon he had won at *écarté*, he should have handed it over to a sister of charity, who, at her own (Marie's) earnest solicitation, had called to offer help to the suffering family, but whose story the Duke interrupted before she had made her purpose known, by handing her the coin to dispense as her best judgment should dictate among the needy poor, saving himself thus the mortification of being a charitable object.

All these things annoyed Marie, certainly, but that annoyance was never upon the surface, and the thought of a baker putting an end to their existence for the sake of a miser-

able ten francs, the merest fraction of her claim, aroused all her spirit of resentment, and she exhibited such evidences of hostility toward the boy that he quickly considered how he could best effect an escape, and when the maid warned him to be gone, shook her cloth in a vigorous and threatening manner, and glanced significantly several times toward the broom, which was within easy reach, he made up his mind that her warning was really for his good, and he forthwith vacated as rapidly as was consistent with the dangers of a winding stairway in a more than ordinarily greasy and uncertain condition.

Half-way down the stairs he encountered the Duchesse wearily climbing to her rooms, discouragement marked upon her face, and too noticeable to escape the quick eye of the youngster. He hurried past her and stopped, looked back, and rubbed his ear—all French boys rub their ears when they don't know what else to do. He watched until she disap-

peared within her apartment and the door closed behind her. Then he slowly followed; one minute he would hesitate, and then go forward; he appeared to be carrying on some mental calculation, and when he had come to its solution he ran rapidly up the remainder of the way, laid four large rolls at the door, and gave the bell an earnest jerk. Then he placed himself at a safe distance below the landing, and when Marie answered his summons he shouted at her, that she might have the old rolls, anyhow—he would pay for them himself; and then he made off, as if even this service was not sufficient to appease the wrath that his previous indiscreet remarks had kindled.

Marie acted always upon principle; her anger was aroused only by acts which she considered flagrant and unworthy, and being aroused, its course must necessarily be run before it could with any degree of dignity be smothered. So it happened that when she

opened the door and found the rolls and heard the youngster's voice, she could not refrain an inaudible though none the less emphatic growl at the audacity of the wretch, while at the same moment the thought that the Duchesse had returned empty-handed from the stores, and the family larder was at an ebb that betokened more positively than anything else could, the unsatisfactory condition of the family treasury, prompted a seizure of the offering, and she allayed her temper with the farinaceous gift, disappearing behind the door, burdened with smiles and buns.

The first inquiry of the Duchesse upon recovering from the asthmatic effect of four flights of steep and winding stairs, was for her daughter Jeanne, to which Marie encouragingly replied that her cheerfulness had been so unmistakable during the short absence of her mother, that it led her to believe the period of actual decline was approaching

a most vital crisis or a most agreeable termination. The Duchesse had one of those timid natures, prone to see danger in everything unusual ; her fears had been fully aroused in Jeanne's case, and while she was the first to discover that consumption was eating away her life, she, at the same moment, learned that the disease was due rather to an affection of the mind than from the weakness of her physical being. The Duchesse was too familiar with the peculiarities of the world to doubt that in her daughter was revived a malady that had been extinct, certainly, for a generation, and she was suffering from an excess of that entirely natural, perhaps, but altogether obsolete complaint spoken of in connection with the heart. The symptoms in this case were confined to incessant writing, desire to be secluded, an unruffled calmness and general resignation to the unkind fate pursuing her ; the more startling phases began with a thoroughly refined cough, given in a tone

clearly indicating it to be one more of the afflictions to which she had become reconciled, and was regarded as such a trifle compared to the other evils, that it neither called for nor received any attention whatever. Then besides, it was an additional burden, and when one is melancholy from love, one regards all persecutions, whether by nature or by man, very properly its own, and rather chooses to hug them in a tearful and silent agony, than to make efforts to vanquish them by some simple pharmaceutical remedy. It becomes a religion with them to suffer; they urge the tortures of the fakir and the enthusiast, and claim the right to torment their soul for an equally holy sentiment; their passion makes them unconscious of the merely physical, and nothing short of positive prostration will satisfy their thirst for bodily pain.

With Jeanne the demand was so unquestionably emphatic, because the love was un-

questionably hopeless, that consumption, pure and simple, became a positive necessity. There were several persons to be convinced that her love was genuine ; the Duchesse was susceptible and impressionable,—a headache, or perhaps a mild form of dyspepsia, if it were properly managed, might answer with her ; but then, there was the Duke, and there was also Marie,—they must be satisfied, and one was of such a disposition as would never notice any external trouble, while the other regarded life in such a very flippant manner as to require the most startling evidence that it really was anything different. All the lesser diseases or disorders had been tried upon these members of the family, with the regular accompaniment of sighs and resigned looks, and as they passed unnoticed, absolute self-respect drove the young lady successively into colds, fevers, epidemics, and finally into a well-matured case of consumption.

By this time the Duke, her papa, and

Marie, her maid, were convinced that she loved.

The Duke, having been married forty years, was disposed to look upon love as a very peculiar, and not altogether natural growth; while Marie, being born a few years before the Duke and the Duchesse wedded, would have sneered openly at the thought, had any other than her mistress been the victim.

When the cause of Jeanne's illness was learned, it became desirable to discover the individuality of the second party to the transaction, and ascertain whether he, too, was affected in the same unfortunate manner; not, perhaps, that anything could be done for him or for her either, but to satisfy the mere passion toward investigation.

This, then, was the condition of everything and of everybody at the very moment when Marie laid the rolls upon the table and replied to the question of the Duchesse, as has been indicated.

As the Duchesse turned to her daughter's room, to greet Jeanne, who was entering the parlor, a step at the door caused them involuntarily to rest in each other's arms until the Duke appeared. His face indicated an unusual melancholy, and after embracing his wife and child, he sank into the one easy-chair that remained to them, buried his face in his hands, and gave himself to the misery of his thoughts.

The Duke was certainly growing old ; he had been wonderfully vigorous during his life, energetic in all that he undertook, and with the fullest confidence in his own resources ; but time and trouble had made great changes in him ; unwise speculation had engulfed his inheritance ; his want of knowledge of the world interfered with his efforts to earn a living, and the tradition of his family that it was undignified for the heir of a noble line to work, left him absolutely nothing to rely upon other than the gentlemanly relaxation

of écarté or baccarat, at neither of which was he noticeably proficient, or even encouragingly fortunate. He was nervous and forgetful; he repeated the same question many times; he gave the impression of doubting his friends' truthfulness in this repetition, as though he would detect them in a misstatement by cleverly wording his interrogations, and yet it was only the result of an unnatural cunning coming from a partial remembrance of his failing, and the uncertainty with him whether he had really made the same inquiry before, and an effort to so frame it upon this occasion that it might not appear objectionable if it did chance to be the twentieth time, more or less. He was careless at meals, garrulous upon trifles, and lacked continuity in his conversation: rapidly changed the subjects, neither having any application to the other; he would interrupt with a frivolous and unimportant suggestion in the middle of his companion's discourse; his thoughts never

appeared to be upon the matter under discussion, and he shuffled when walking. These indicated loss of power, failing of mental and physical abilities,—unmistakable evidences that the Duke had grown old ; and as he sat upon the chair, bowing his head upon his hands, he was the embodiment of despair, the wreck of a life, a disappointed, penniless, helpless man. The teachings of his youth had gathered in strength with his years, and their idiosyncrasies became stronger as his brain became weaker. Peculiarities of early training, that had been such trifles as to call for no attention during his vigor, were now revived, burnished and exaggerated into principles. Other peculiarities that had been marked, now became bigotries ; he indulged in scandal, though this was necessarily limited, as his listeners seldom exceeded his wife and daughter ; he was gossipy ; he moved the furniture about unnecessarily and nervously ; he changed the position of his

knife and fork a score of times before he began to eat; he was easily fatigued, readily injured, and was prone to accidents. There was no question about it, the Duke was old.

He had been particularly unfortunate that day; he had relied upon a small loan from a friend, but the friend, failing to comprehend the terrible importance of the trifling sum, for the reason that the true condition of the Duke was known to none of his associates, had gone to the Provinces for a jaunt, and taken the small loan with him. Such accidents affected the Duke; aside from the mere failure to get the money, the doubt was ever with him whether or not such mishaps were intended as slights, or whether, in fact, they were mere inadvertences.

Jeanne took advantage of the interruption of her father's entrance, to withdraw to her own room; her heartaches were so severe that it excused the apparent indifference to those of her parents; besides, had she not been

through this same scene day after day? was she not a sufferer too, as well as they, from the same poverty? and, finally, what was hunger, anyway, when one grieved for an unfortunate love?

And so, Jeanne went to her room and her diary, and poured out her thoughts and troubles in ink. The Duchesse deceived her husband into the belief that the house was provided with the requirements of the day, and sought to divert his mind from the troubles of finances, to the equally serious question of their daughter's health.

The Duke was soon acquainted with the particulars of Jeanne's illness as they were understood by his wife, and he discovered an unusual interest in the subject. He loved his child, and he respected her; she was so unlike him, her disposition was such a gentle one; she said so little and thought so much; her temper was sweet, unassuming; she was willing to be imposed upon for the sake of peace,

and she had enjoyed the privilege accorded all such characters of meeting those who were quite willing to impose upon her. Her bearing was dignified and her manners were the accompaniment of patrician blood. Unusual for a French woman, she was a blonde; her figure was slender and graceful, and the ever-present sadness upon her face was the reflection of a life of privations, an unmeasured sympathy for her parents' struggles, and latterly the encouragement of her secret affection. Her education was ordinary, without being finished, for the limited resources of her family had forbidden other than the learning offered by the State. A natural wit compensated in part for this, though it must be confessed that she was neither unusually brilliant nor yet uncommonly bright. Her charm lay in the equanimity of her temper and the unselfishness of her actions.

Such a mental picture of Jeanne passed through the father's mind as he gazed upon

the ground, action paralyzed by the intensity of his thoughts. As he stared at the boards he made honest efforts to concentrate in his mind the circumstances surrounding the problem of their existence. Was it to be a futile trial? would he waver to other less important subjects? Pictures of Jeanne married and comfortable flitted before him; his manhood was asserted, and he forgot himself; he consigned his own future to the chances of fate, and cared only to see his wife and daughter provided for. The feeling seemed to give him energy; he roused himself; he threw off the incubus of his life, and resolved to accomplish marvels that very day. It was the first time in years that he had been stirred to the heart; he had become so accustomed to poverty and misfortune that he had ceased to struggle; he looked upon them as instances of such unmistakable injustice that it was needless to contend with them.

To emphasize his resolution, he struck the

arm of the chair a vigorous blow, and sprang to his feet as with renewed youth, just at the moment that a ring at the door announced a visitor.

Dr. Cold (his name, in fact, was Froid, but as he was at one time professor of English in a Parisian academy, he realized, with true French intuition, that it was not altogether the proper thing to retain the French of a name which could be so readily translated into the language he undertook to teach) was an occasional caller at the home of the d'Almabys ; he had taken an interest in Jeanne, and whenever his professional engagements permitted, he would pass an hour, more or less, pleasantly in her company ; he tried to revive her spirits ; he gave her what amusement was possible ; the Theatre Francais had not lost Sarah Bernhardt, and the "*Pilules du Diable*" was at the Chatelet ; the Hippodrome and the Cirque d'Été were open, and it was the Doctor's own fault if he could

not find some means for diverting the mind of his patient. His attentions were so kindly and so disinterested that he became a most welcome guest, and Jeanne was as happy to see him as were her father and mother.

So it was that when the Duke entered the parlor in response to the summons of Marie announcing the Doctor as the caller, that he greeted him most cordially, wishing him much health and much happiness. The Doctor was in excellent spirits, jocose and light-hearted; he rallied the Duke upon his appearance, and declared he looked younger by one of their national revolutions than he had when he last saw him; he inquired after the good Duchesse and the invalid, and then drawing his chair closer to that of his royal companion he said he had called on business—business of a delightful character; he was, in fact, the bearer of good tidings—the envoy of a Count; he had been commissioned to bring joy into the home of the d'Almabys,

and impart joy into that of another; in short, he had been intrusted by the Count de Lima to solicit the hand of Jeanne in marriage; the Count was a man of no little importance and considerable wealth; he was steady and circumspect in his habits, generous and noble in his life; it was true he had not the honor of an acquaintance with the lady, but he had known of her since she was a child; he had watched her at play, had followed her years as they accumulated, and found she was as innocent and as sweet at twenty as she was at twelve; he had loved her in silence, and now he was ready to claim her. Could he have her? His mamma waited a reply to call and ask the honor of the alliance; and he interrupted the Duke's attempted explanation that his daughter was dying, with the assurance that it was a knowledge of this fact that urged the Count to immediate decision, for he felt a change of climate—a trip to Italy, or a tour of the watering-places, would restore the

health and spirits of his bride. Could the Duke hesitate? would it not be bringing a new life to his child? would she not find here the means of lengthening her life? And as if to show the very depth of his goodness of heart, the Count agreed to place one hundred thousand francs at Jeanne's disposal the day they married. Think of the good that would accomplish! The Duchesse was not really well; a foreign trip would benefit her amazingly; it would restore her; it would give her new strength.

And the Duke wavered; there was no objection that he knew of to the marriage; it would certainly be a desirable thing for Jeanne; at any rate it would not shorten her existence. Here was the opportunity he had just been thinking of, praying for; the thought of it, or of gaining it, had brought him to his feet and a resolution not half an hour previous; he saw ease for the Duchesse and for himself, leaving out of the question

the advantages to Jeanne, and he turned to heartily accept the offer, when the Doctor, with a smile that suggested the non-importance of his communication, said that the Count had advised him of a little indiscretion some years old, which resulted in a boy of tender age whom he had always kept about him, and he hoped in marrying that his wife would be willing to accept the guardianship, and become a mother to the child. It was a creditable act, and might be done with all honor.

The guardianship of the child, or the assurance that the wife would do her full duty toward educating and bringing the boy up, would in themselves have been no cause for objection with the Duke; such understandings are not only legalized by law, but, very properly, sanctioned by society in France; but the question had suggested itself to the Duke so soon as the Doctor stated his business: Why should a rich and titled stranger

seek a penniless, dying girl? and until the child was brought into the subject this question was the one puzzle of the situation. Here was the answer, this remark of the Doctor, and it stung him as some venomous thing, and brought him to his feet with an energy that surprised and startled his companion.

So his daughter was sought in marriage to give a name to an illegitimate child; the title of an honorable house was to be degraded into an excuse for the existence of a disowned infant, and worse than all, it was wanted but temporarily; his daughter was selected because she must soon die, when the Count would be at liberty to marry the real mother. This was the scheme, and the Doctor had the effrontery, the arrogance, to come to him with such a proposition, and to talk of honor, the honor of a bourgeoisie, not the honor of a nobleman. What had he done to call forth such an insult? of what had his poor daughter been guilty that she should ever be enter-

tained in connection with such a thought? It was useless for the Doctor to urge the great advantage to Jeanne of a trip to the warmer climate of Marseilles or Florence; needless to revert to the declining health of the Duchesse; better death, extinction, annihilation, a thousand times better than life at such a cost, at the expense of honor, integrity, decency. Though poverty, undisguised, had been the companion of the d'Almabys for years, though want and privation had left their mark upon Jeanne, undermined the health of the Duchesse, and unsettled the mind of the Duke, though this had been accomplished, and worse than this was to be expected, still the pride of a royal line was left them, and he hurled it with all his force at the head of the offending and confused Doctor. The lip of the Duke curled with scorn as he denounced Cold, and as the last words were shrieked at him to leave the house, the Duke, overcome with the excitement of the moment, exhausting the

artificial strength which indignation had given him, sank into the corner of the sofa.

As the Doctor hesitated, abashed, hardly knowing what step to take next, and about concluding that his exit was the one way left him out of the difficulty, the portiere was thrown hastily aside, and the Duchesse, carrying in her hand an open diary, hurried to her husband, apparently oblivious to the presence of another, and eagerly exclaiming that she had discovered the secret at last, she pushed the open book into the hand of the Duke. Involuntarily his eyes sought the written page; he started, read, became absorbed in his reading, lost himself in the words before him, when with a suddenness that was a counterpart of the energy shown a few moments before, he cast the book into the corner, and, springing to the Doctor's side, grasped his hand, shook it, cried over it, and pressing it to his heart, called him his best friend, the savior of his family, and

sobbed out the proposal of the Count was accepted, and all that remained was to invite the Count's mother to call.

Astounded and astonished by the rapid change in the decision and manner of the Duke, the Doctor stood irresolute, and it was not until he had been gently hurried from the door that he could gather his senses.

III.

MRS. SPARKS OF PARIS.

MRS. SPARKS was a fascinating lady of some thirty years, not more than six inches over five feet in height, and weighing, say, one hundred and forty pounds, with the pounds very judiciously and attractively distributed,—a fact she prided herself on not a little, and one she regarded as no small element in her social success. Had the ever-welcome Buttercup been materialized by some French author, she would, no doubt, have been modeled after Mrs. Sparks as a “plump and pleasing person.”

There is no more distressing experience than to be conscious of a fascinating form gracefully making its way along the crowded walk before us, and as one hastens his steps and passes the delicately clad foot and the irre-

sistible Jersey, to find a face that would cause the Veiled Prophet to blush, or discover the vivacious and willing thirty to be an austere and decorous sixty tricked out to cause disappointment--a living paraphrase of the shadow mankind is supposed to be, and the deceptions he is said to pursue.

Mrs. Sparks was not plain ; her figure was delicious, her face entrancing ; hers was not the innocent nor the perpetually astonished expression of the bread-and-butter girl ; it was the intelligent countenance of one who had lived with her eyes open, and gave the impression that while her personal regard for the conventionalities was strict, she was conscious that others, or at any rate *some* others, entertained this regard in a lesser degree, and she was too familiar with the eccentricities of the day to either marvel or be shocked at such a variation from her own views.

In fact she was a woman of the world, and her apartments at 29, Avenue Josephine, the

premiere, were the resort of the literary, political, and social celebrities of Paris. She was familiar with the writings of every important author from Balzac to Canon Kingsley; Bunyan, Farrar, Stanley, and the lesser lights, were at her tongue upon the instant, and if a bishop or even an American clergyman who had forsaken the "cloth" for a Parisian life chanced to be among her company, she could recall passages from the contemporaries of Josephus and follow it up through Martin Tupper, finally touching their innermost fancy with an excerpt from Walt Whitman; her accomplishments in the frivolities were equally conspicuous, and she was poetry itself to the music of Waldteufel's latest; she claimed the honor, in common with all other French school-children, of having placed a crown of roses upon the head of Victor Hugo; and she possessed a husband who enjoyed the singular distinction of never having been decorated.

When it is said that Mrs. Sparks enter-

tained the best-known people in Paris, it must not be understood that this also included Mr. Sparks, for that gentleman being a very clever and a very discriminating party, made it convenient to be absent when many of his wife's acquaintances called, so that there were a considerable number who, being quite well known to the wife, had never enjoyed the pleasure of meeting the husband. Such friends found consolation for this neglect in the thought that they might pass Mr. Sparks upon the stairs without being recognized as a visitor, and might even be mistaken for an upper tenant, all of which served to convince them that ladies with suspicious husbands would find it advantageous always to have, at least, one flat on the floor above.

Mrs. Sparks had formed the most desirable social connections, and her society was courted by a distinctively refined company; each Sunday saw her at the Eglise St. Augustine, where, with prayer-book in hand, she closely

followed the words of the reverend teacher, and devoutly and demurely observed the proprieties of her religion. Nothing was allowed to interfere with her Monday dispensation of charities, and her *douceur*, at the entrance of the church, was liberal and unostentatious. She consistently crossed herself at the passing of every funeral, and she virtuously and properly frowned upon the example of Père Hyacinthe ; she was an ultramontane when the Jesuits were expelled from France, and she entertained Gambetta the same evening in the most hospitable manner. Her outward conduct, in a word, was irreproachable, and as she had never been the heroine of a scandal, her reputation was unsullied and her fame was fair. Her female friends,—and with the good judgment of a thoughtful woman, she cultivated only a few,—made her a participant in their secrets and gossip, and poured out their mutual surprise and condemnation at and upon

some recent publication of another's shortcomings.

When a woman so far forgets herself as to permit the public to participate in her knowledge of current events, the indignation of her associates at the carelessness is generally emphatic and unmistakable. Mrs. Sparks had avoided such unpleasantness most successfully, and so long as this good fortune followed her, she could count upon the constancy of her associates, notwithstanding a certain boy that had been adopted by the lady and her husband, and bearing such a striking resemblance to the former that she might have been mistaken for a closer relation than that of foster-mother, had there been any reason to doubt her assurances on the subject. But then, Mr. Sparks explained that it was a child his wife had found and become interested in during some one of her charitable excursions, and had insisted upon removing from its surroundings.

The evening following that upon which the reader was introduced to the Bullier, Mrs. Sparks entertained a brilliant company at dinner. The best of Parisian cookery was served; it was impossible to distinguish by sight or taste the character of the dishes. The spice of the *bœuf à la mode* was raised in the same garden, and in the same bed, with that in which the delicate little potatoes were fried, and indescribable compositions, much resembling birds, but really something entirely dissimilar, it was impossible to dissect. The salad and the *poire condée* were distinctively delicate, and the wines, as could be expected, were especially rich. It was such a dinner as Bignon, or the Maison d'Oré, or the Trois Feres, in their time, would serve, and it melted away like a delightful dream before the thoroughly business energies of a score of visitors.

Among the gentlemen was the Count de Lima, a nobleman of the ante-bellum days,

one who had lost his possessions at the time of the Prussian war, and when the Commu-
nistic cloud engulfed Paris and swept away
the landmarks of the nobility, it took with it
the property of the Count, and left his father
with a house and a few thousand francs. But
the Count's father had invested in Southern
cotton before the American Rebellion, and
was looking forward with no little anxiety to
the election of an American President who
would favor the payment of just such claims
as this gentleman represented.

This is the only interest the French take in
American politics, though it is widespread,
for creditors of the Southern Confederacy
who are willing to become recognized cred-
itors of the United States, are numerous on
French soil. There is a strong disposition
upon the part of American papers to talk of the
"Sister Republic," and indulge in endearing
terms toward the government which more near-
ly approaches this nation than does any other.

American families and tourists visit Paris in vast numbers yearly, and support the bric-a-brac trade, the notion business of that city, by their generous expenditures; yet the knowledge of America is very limited to the Parisian. Brazil is the French embodiment of the American continent; any observant visitor to Paris who has had the curiosity to discover the extent of the native acquaintance with American geography must have been impressed with the entire indifference to every place north of the equator. Whether it is that the more extended connections with South America have expunged North America from their minds, or whether their geographies are deficient in Mercator's system of laying out the continents, is a matter for conjecture. But, be it as it may, the mind *Francais* refuses to grapple with more than one locality for this side of the ocean.

However the Count was able, the Count's father possessed a talent—a talent for making

money,—strange development for a scion of an old house, but with it he partly redeemed his fortune and restored, in a measure, the standing of his family. The Count, too, by a wise investment in oil and it was rumored by a lucky ticket in the Bartholdi Statue lottery, had acquired quite a competency of his own, so that the one hundred thousand francs he offered the Doctor the previous night at the Bullier for disposal upon a wife, was by no means the extent of his resources; besides, Mrs. Sparks had a fortune in her own right and she was willing to place that at the Count's command should he require the aid.

In a lull between the discussions of a recent scientific work upon the best method of coining a new word, written by a member of the French Academy and very kindly chaperoned into notice upon this occasion by the hostess, Mrs. Sparks found an opportunity to withdraw with the Count into the seclusion of a convenient conservatory and receive from him

the particulars of his arrangement with the Doctor, the plan which had been devised for the Count's marriage, and the assumed maternity of the boy—the boy, by the way, Mrs. Sparks had been so solicitous in recovering from the temptations of the street and the example of wretched surroundings.

The Count appeared now to be as thoroughly in earnest as he had been the night before, and the minutest details of the scheme were explained, the chances pro and con of the young lady's living, and the chances, likewise pro and con, of the venerable Mr. Sparks' dying, to both of which propositions the conclusion con in one instance and pro in the other being apparently satisfactory, the affectionate couple indulged in protestations of mutual esteem, discussed the happiness which would be theirs when the prospective bride of the one and the mediæval husband of the other should be at rest and Leon, the boy, should be enabled to lisp his "pa" and "ma," sanc-

tioned by the priest and the Mairie, and with an expression of discontent that the conventionalities of society required them to return to the parlor, they joined the guests and were at once absorbed in the discussion of the merits of a certain Corot the hostess had recently acquired, and which evidently passed in the unspoken mind of some of her friends as the work of an obscure, though talented artist who found his labors more encouragingly received under the name of this brother painter than could possibly occur did he egotistically attach his own initials.

Mrs. Sparks, after the Corot was determined to be genuine, recounted for certainly the twentieth time the account of her feelings and actions upon the expulsion of the Jesuits, how she had early in the day gone to the Rue de Bac and displayed her sympathy by various feminine comments upon the action of the government, and expressed her willingness to house one or more of the homeless priests,

This latter, however, was urged in such a very timid and unassuming manner, that none of the ejected parties thought of taking advantage of it though, singularly enough, when she discovered that all had been provided for her voice became stronger and her home more expansive.

It was unnecessary for any intimation to be given the Count that he should remain beyond the departure of the other guests ; it had become a habit with him to do so, though he had the good judgment to avoid attracting attention to the special hospitality he thus enjoyed by withdrawing at an unobserved moment to the retirement of an adjoining smoking-room, which was deserted, as the guests made ready to depart.

Hardly had the last one bid his adieux, when the Count heard the hastening steps of the hostess approaching and as she threw herself impetuously and wearily on the lounge, she murmured a regret that the Doc-

tor had not found it possible to acquaint them that very night with the result of his efforts with Miss d'Almaby ; in fact, her impatience would hardly permit her to await the morrow when there was a certainty of having all the information the Doctor possessed ; until then they must be content with speculation, but it was assumed that it would be as they wished, for the very reason that they *did* wish it and they had too great knowledge of human nature to believe one hundred thousand francs would be refused.

The idea as it was framed by the conversation, was for the Count to take his bride for a short trip through Germany, possibly touch Switzerland, and if the malady from which she suffered had not by that time disposed of the question in its own peculiar manner, Italy was to be visited, where the smells and the fever were relied upon to aid the natural disease in bringing matters to a focus.

A Galatea, strange to human dissimulation,

would have been surprised to have listened to the nonchalant disposition that was thus made of two lives—the young lady and the effete husband, but the disposition was made in such an exceedingly agreeable tone and accompanied by such an effervescence of wit, as to bring it to the level of quite an ordinary affair, and when the Count lighted his cigarette and saluted his hostess for the night, there was no semblance to the Conspirator or the Nihilist in his voice—nothing in their manner other than the gentleman parting from the lady and wishing her many pleasant dreams and much anticipation of a happy future.

IV.

THE COUNTESS CALLS!

It was not until the day following that upon which Dr. Cold asked the hand of Jeanne that he returned with the Countess, who, in accordance with the delightfully simple law, or possibly only custom of France, must conclude the bargain for her son's wife. It must not be thought that the Doctor lost time unnecessarily, but he had professional duties requiring some share of his attention and it was late in the evening before he had an opportunity of advising the Countess of his success—so late, indeed, that the Count had gone to Mrs. Sparks' social gathering, which, upon this one occasion, the Doctor did not care to join.

There are many peculiar and to a more practical people, very many unnecessary be-

longings to French life and manners, but nothing can be much more ridiculous than their marriage laws. Should a man attain the age universally allotted to humankind and still have the blessing of a living father, it would be necessary, before the son could indulge in the other blessing of a wife, to secure the written consent of that father, though he might be at the furthest ends of the earth ; though he might be an unnatural parent who would delay or neglect or absolutely refuse to give the permission asked, and during this suspense the son would remain uncertain as to its result, and upon the final refusal he must sacrifice his feelings and resign his intended bride, or must reconcile himself to marry in defiance of a pronounced social law without his father's sanction, and live with a wife whose claim to him would be, at least, questionable, and whose children would be in the eyes of the State, illegitimate. French society rec-

ognizes no years of discretion, no age at which independence is assured the son or the daughter, so long as the parent may survive.

It was in conformity with this provision that the Countess de Lima called upon Jeanne d'Almaby. It was merely a preliminary visit, a means of becoming acquainted before the more serious considerations were entered into; and by the cheerful reception, differing so greatly from the dignified and sorrowful tone anticipated by the Countess aware as she was of the reasons for the marriage and the convenience only that had made Jeanne the affianced of her son, the acquaintance developed with remarkable rapidity into a feeling of mutual esteem and affection.

The Countess was attracted toward the girl by the frankness that marked every word she uttered and by the evident purity of her thoughts, a purity unlike the simple pretensions of ignorance, but with the self-respect of one who knowing wrong, prefers the right.

It was a disposition so different to that which the Countess had been accustomed in society and appealed so forcibly to her own noble heart, that she instinctively prayed for her recovery and felt that her son in pursuit of a selfish end had indeed found a treasure worthy of his care.

Jeanne, with spirits revived and the old life brought back into her eyes and the smile to her lips, listened to the words of the Countess, and felt with every syllable that her happiness was increasing. It appeared as if imagination must be responsible for her change. How could she reconcile this romantic termination of her love?—a termination so at variance with anything she might have looked for. She could hardly believe herself the heroine of such an incident; she lost sight of the great change in her worldly condition; she cared little for the privations and sufferings of the past, gave no thought to the entire relief from such in the future; her brain,

her heart, every chord in her being capable of participating in the wonderful contentment and joy, was thrilled with the thoughts of her promised husband.

The Countess was rejoiced at the apparent improvement in Jeanne's spirits; she wound her arms about her and told her how much they would love each other, and what delightful trips they would make into the country, and how she should have everything she required and all the comforts that love could suggest; in fact, she offered such a volume of promises and so painted the future in *couleur de rose*, that Jeanne knew not what to say and could only blush and hide her happy face on the shoulder of her new friend. And the Countess told her how good she was, and how kind she had been to make such sacrifices, and how they should always feel under obligations to her. Then Jeanne looked up with a puzzled expression, replying that she herself was the one upon whom the obligation

should rest. She had been in poverty and they lifted her into luxury ; she was dead and they brought her to life ; and, besides, did she not love the Count ? How could it be said that she had made sacrifices !

Then the Countess asked if it was not something to be grateful for, that she should have adopted the child and given it a name—a right to exist.

Slowly Jeanne raised her head and disengaged herself from the arms about her ; the puzzled look had been replaced by an expression that was almost of death ; it appeared as though the agonies she had passed through had returned in a mass and driven the blood from her body and the hope from her heart ; it required no assumed shock, no pretence of alarm ; the consciousness of what still remained to tell was in her mind ; she divined the story in the few words the Countess had uttered ; what cared she who or where the child was, or what the circumstances

were? it was enough that policy instead of love had been the motive of the Count in seeking to marry her. Mortification and shame she felt, and her life seemed to startle new torments that came forth upon her and overwhelmed her; everything she could have had to live for was taken from her; and to the distressing position of loneliness was added the unbearable horror of being united to a man whose thoughts, if not his words, would be a constant protest to her existence. She realized that the motive prompting the Count to such a step must be a strong one, and she understood intuitively that the selection of a bride was made entirely upon the assurances of short life guaranteed by the Doctor. She must die, as she viewed it; to live would show selfishness unworthy of her. How could her own passion so have misled her brain as to cause her to believe the Count loved her? had she no wiser promptings in her own mind than the dream-

ings of a love-sick girl? why not refuse now to go any further?

And then the thought of her mother came before her,—a mother dying from the privations and sufferings of poverty,—whose life depended on the change this marriage would make possible—the change from starvation to health.

So she controlled her anguish and said nothing.

Then the Countess continued her story and told it all, even the hopes, or perhaps she hesitated about making it thus strong, and said merely the expectation of her son, that she should live but a few months at most; and then she added her own condemnation of the mother of the child, her own love for the girl which had sprung up in her heart in a moment, the sweetness that had forced respect and admiration into love, and she beseeched Jeanne to aid her in reclaiming the son; he would love her, she knew he would;

she must live: they would leave Paris and seek the climate of the South; let her forget herself again, and they would unite in bringing the Count to an understanding of himself and of his duties.

To the listener all words were alike, criminations and sympathy were the same; she heeded them not, nor did she seem to hear. She had resolved, despicable as it was, to offer no protest, to marry the Count. Her head fell again upon the shoulder of the Countess, and she made no effort to repress a sob.

V.

A DOUBLE ROBBERY.

HAST thou ever been in the Magasin du Louvre? If not, don't go. It is a combination of Grecian, Turkish, and Italian brigandage; it is pure, simple, unadulterated robbery from the Rue Valois to the Rue de Marengo. It is a brutal, *coulisse* mode of thievery; it has none of the finesse that sends a customer away fully aware that he has been squeezed of his last centime, but with a smile and a grim appreciation of the salesman's adroitness in accomplishing it. Oh, no, there is nothing of that sort about this; it is a sand-club and slung-shot species of desperadoism. A customer is hounded, followed, shadowed, tortured; he is charged ten francs, and the store takes what it can get; every known language on earth is thrown at him by the

most voluble, loquacious, and audacious congregation of inquisitors that were ever gathered together under one skylight; they are peculiarly and distinctively French, tragic caricatures, truth exaggerated—still truth.

It is the belief of many that these salespeople might be tried, convicted, and transported as highwaymen, and highwaywomen as well, unfortunately. There are a score or more cashiers and each sits like a gigantic, all-grasping Moloch, taking in everything to be reached, while the victims range themselves in line to give up their Napoleons and receive closely-wrapped parcels in exchange. The Magasin du Louvre is the quintessence of unprovoked outrage, and a few words explain the cause—the clerks receive a commission on everything they sell. The administration of the establishment saves in salary and turns its customer over to a hungry, rabid mob of *estrangeurs*, who are worse than anything Gaboriou ever conceived.

Three months after the marriage of Jeanne with the Count, Mrs. Sparks felt a curiosity to know how the bride's health withstood the assault of weather and an indifferent husband, in fact it might be said that the lady had become quite uneasy, for the Count true to his promise, had refused to see her or hold any communication with her since he had wedded Jeanne.

This Count had stately notions of honor as peculiar in their way as those of the Duke, his father-in-law, and, in accordance with them, he had declared that so long as his wife lived he would lose sight of Mrs. Sparks ; but immediately upon her death he would return to his original love,—a resolution he intended to keep in every particular. But Mrs. Sparks could not help feeling uncomfortable ; she was in that condition of uncertainty which was in no measure calculated to bring with it even comparative ease of mind. If she could be advised of what transpired in the house-

hold of those whom she considered her enemies, it would be some advantage certainly and might be of considerable value in case of emergency. She knew perfectly well that the Countess disliked—detested her, and would use all the influence possible to break the intimacy between herself and the Count, even in the event of Jeanne's death. She had heard that the entire family had gone to the South of France in search of a milder climate, hoping to prolong the young wife's life or make her dying more easy.

These were the thoughts running through the brain of Mrs. Sparks as she stood upon the line at the cashier's desk of the *Magasin du Louvre* awaiting her turn to be served; she was in a frame of mind to make use of any advantage circumstances might point out to her, and she was equally alert in discovering the circumstance. As her eye wandered unconsciously, or, at any rate, idly over the room, she recognized the Duke, Jeanne's fa-

ther, at a distant counter examining some cheap pocket-pencils which the clerk was vigorously asserting were a real American product, a veritable "breveté Americaine," and urging a purchase in the regulation sledge-hammer form.

The thought of using the Duke as her spy had, singularly enough, never occurred to Mrs. Sparks until this very moment, but now it came so forcibly upon her that she was in a fever of excitement at once, and fidgeted up to the desk in a natural feminine manner to the evident discomfiture of several gentlemen who had precedence by right of their position on the line, but who, of course, were unable or unwilling to urge their claim in the face of the determined and impulsive female. With change and parcel in hand, Mrs. Sparks fluttered over to the Duke and greeted that nobleman with a warmth and fervor that must have aroused a suspicion of its sincerity in a younger man, though it made no other im-

pression than one of the most gratifying and intoxicating surprise upon its present recipient, who most unceremoniously dropped the clerk and threw himself, metaphorically, into the arms of the fascinating lady.

When men reach the age of the Duke, they become particularly susceptible to the blandishments of a pretty woman ; a coquettish glance or a neat foot compressed in a dainty boot, will suffice to throw them into an "ecstasy of rhapsody," and they frequently conclude by attracting the amused attention of spectators by their merry ambulations (we may speak of this unreservedly, for we are all growing in years).

The Duke sustained the record ; there might be a stencil made of an old gentleman's actions under these circumstances, and it could be used with accuracy upon every such occasion. It is infallible. The Duke was first surprised, then pleased, then tickled, finally confidential, and eventually suspicious that

the crowd would discover what it had already known for fully ten minutes; after a while he looked guilty and ended the farce by leading the lady away with all the gallantry of the Grande Monarque.

The Duke was voluble; he liked to talk; it was about the only occupation he had now and he made the most of it. This unfortunate disposition was not prompted by a desire or even a willingness to injure any one, it was simply second nature; he couldn't control it, and it accomplished an incomparable amount of mischief. Thus Mrs. Sparks had little difficulty in learning all that there was to be learned relating to the household of the Count. The bride was more contented, almost happy in fact. They were now at Nice. Jeanne was improving rapidly; there were many reasons for believing that she would survive. The Duchesse was with her daughter, as was also the Countess, and as would likewise be the Duke within a few days, or at

least such was his intention, but now having so fortunately encountered such an irresistibly charming companion he would fain rest in Paris longer and enjoy some of the autumn evenings upon the ever-moving boulevards.

And he did rest, while Mrs. Sparks gleaned much information from the letters which found their way primarily from Nice to the Duke, and by him were coyly submitted to her. The information was not of a soothing character for a loving and a jealous mind ; it aroused her wrath and it pointed too forcibly toward a possible danger—a danger which even now had exceeded the possible and come within the scope of the probable. It showed her that the Count might love his wife, incomprehensible as such an exaggerated or exhilarated condition of the human mind might seem to be—in France. The plausibility of the idea actually brought a shiver to the vertebra of the lady, and as the Duke had his favored position beside her when this queer

thought occurred, he noticed the convulsive motion, and in his senile way, strove to fan back the natural warmth of the human temperature by the sweetest and most flattering phrases. And Mrs. Sparks snuggled down a little closer into the corner of her *longe chaise*, while she reverted to the young couple once again, showing her interest in their welfare and their contentment by a mitrailleusish volley of questions upon hypothetical conditions in which she placed them, that of bliss, fondness, amiability, love and ecstasy, to all of which the Duke smiled his replies, and rattled on about the daughter whom he really loved and really respected to the woman whom he swore he did love and for whom he never stopped to consider the depth of his respect.

The time passes very quickly in Paris, especially in the society of a pretty woman, and the Duke found that one day slipped by and then another and the days lengthened

themselves into weeks while he still lingered at the side of Mrs. Sparks.

The witchery of her smile was irresistible and his afternoons were devoted to her society in her apartments, while the evenings frequently found them at the Opera or the Française, enjoying dinner at Bignon's, or a simple cream at the less pretentious Neapolitaine. Occasionally they went to the extent of a ball, an enthusiastic ball, not one of those gotten up to afford reputable women an opportunity of displaying charms which good health and possibly good living has enabled them to acquire, but which the conventionalities of society forbid them to make public excepting under the particular and peculiar circumstances of a ball devised for charitable purposes.

The Duke was not entranced by this sort of entertainment; he had reached that age when the flowing and less cumbrous robes of the coryphee or the Opera-Bouffe prima donna

appealed with greater artistic and esthetic force to his sense of the beautiful. Neither could he be cajoled into an impecunious, but strictly respectable, reception; that, he argued, was the most intolerable suffering to which any one was socially liable. He could not appreciate the modest efforts of the maidens to find in their vocabulary of words which had received the stamp and sanction of their mammas, sufficient to interest their attendants, nor could he discover a wealth of conversational humor in recalling the difference between the weather of this month and the tempestuous season of last month; nor the excited discussion upon the most recent *Herald* storm warning as sent by special cable for just such gatherings as these to waste their intellectual force in dissecting. The Duke was not opposed to these reunions because of pride; he was not a proud man in that sense, his dignity was the bearing of a gentleman; he had a contempt for those persons who were

simply dignified and nothing more—that is, internally dignified, those who forget that they touch the sidewalk in common with a few million other living things, those whose soul seems to be in a constant protest against its confinement in so plebeian a compass as the body. Such persons were not at all to the favor of the Duke; he felt such dignity was generally assumed to conceal some serious fault which policy forbade making prominent.

The Duke favored the balls at the Valentino, or the Skating-Rink, at times and just for the fun of the thing, Mrs. Sparks accompanied him though always beneath the discreet protection of a mask.

With all its revelry, there is considerable pleasure to be had at a masked ball; each is like the other, of course, but it is a repetition that is too vigorous to become monotonous, and too brilliant to become tiresome. The crowd of budding youths gathers about the

doors of the hall early in the evening, hoping that by some fortuitous freak of events they may be able to pass free into the festivities which ten francs have made inaccessible to them by any legitimate means. Later, straggling couples, largely made up of "visiting statesmen" from adjacent rural districts, who are not yet familiar with the hours kept by the true Parisian and cannot throw aside the habit of yawning at nine o'clock; still later, the crowds increase on the sidewalk; speculators are quietly offering admission tickets at an appreciable reduction from the regular prices; the youths become more nervous and apprehensive of eventual failure as the strains of music become more pronounced; carriages are formed into line, leaving and receiving occupants, and, finally, as time wears on, the sidewalk looks gloomy and cold and uninviting.

But what a sight the interior presents at the true French ball: the early rush, the

crush at the coat-room, the crowd of attendant males craning necks around the door of the ladies' dressing-room to anticipate within the pleasing costumes which will later on meet them upon the waxed floor of the hall; the crowded dancing, where one is constantly dug in the ribs or back by the elbows of the dancers; when the alarm-notes of a quadrille sound, notice the haste with which the young men surround a popular set and their eagerness in disputing the first place with their neighbors; then, as the dance nears its end, the music becomes wilder and more hurried, the dancers affect an enthusiasm even if they do not feel it; they develop joints entirely new to the human frame; they are reckless of everything save the single purpose of astonishing the spectators; they promenade, and everybody fans everybody else; and the quantity of meaningless conversation that is indulged in is only measured by the hour. A valse follows and soon everything is in a

whirl once more ; the long train of Marie Antoinette tangles about the flesh-colored limbs of a dainty page, or is slung carelessly over the arm of a false-nosed youth with whom she dances — and repetitions of this make up the ball.

The Duke had exhausted the list of these entertainments ; he had seen everything that was new at the theaters, from “ *L'Estrangleurs de Paris* ” to Patti or Van Zandt ; Mrs. Sparks had no reason to complain of his attention, nor on his side had he any grounds for doubting that she really enjoyed this round of amusements ; the limit to his vacation had been set, however, and he must join his wife in the South. His letters from the Duchesse breathed all the good tidings he could wish ; both she and his daughter urged his hastening to them unconscious, of course, of the enchanting imprisonment that kept him in Paris.

Mrs. Sparks assisted him to get ready ; she

did an hundred little things that a woman can do when one is preparing for a journey ; she suggested all sorts of economies of space, and insisted upon the easy packing of a score of useful articles so handy in traveling. She submitted her advice in buying a trunk ; she liked to go into a trunk-store, she said, it recalled the pleasant trips she had taken, and inspired her with the anticipation of those she intended to take. And then she thought of the man who kept the store : suppose his was a nature that craved change, his strongest ambition to journey around the world and his weakest point his financial inability to do so ; what an unspeakable torment it must be to him to be surrounded at all times with the paraphernalia of travel, to start parties upon the very trip he longs to take ; to hear them talk of the scenes they will see, the very scenes he has passed through in his dreams—and all this he must receive with a smile, a cordial congratulation, that he may sell a

trunk. Mrs. Sparks was not hard-hearted when she could think so far into the possibility of arousing a disturbing thought in the man's mind by a superabundance of enthusiasm, and so she controlled her spirits, and made no reference to the pleasure her wanderings had given her, nor what the Duke might expect from his.

When the Duke reached the depot prepared to take leave of Paris, Mrs. Sparks was awaiting him. She was profuse in her wishes for his happiness and his health, and waved him a graceful, while it seemed also a reluctant adieu, as he stepped upon the car.

At the same time that he entered his compartment a man of tidy appearance, though clearly of the working element, stepped into the next carriage and although the delicate hand of Mrs. Sparks was waving away the Duke, her eyes appeared to be fixed upon the stranger in the second-class.

VI.

THE LAIR OF THE ROUGHS.

THERE is a section of Paris which is either avoided by strangers or only overlooked because they are not aware of its existence. It is the Hill of Montmatre, with its unsavory neighborhoods, its dirty houses, subterranean brasseries, and its general air of dilapidated splendor. It may at one period have enjoyed a reputation for respectability, or at any rate for safety. Now it has no claims on either ; it is an outcast, or at best a nondescript. Some of its houses show what might have been, but are compelled to show it through such a mass of dirt that the effort in most instances is discouraged before it is born. The buildings are out of plumb and the tenants lay wagers upon the possible time of day when the walls will fall in. Everything betokens degeneration,

decay, destruction ; the dingy, musty, tumble-down wall of the Chateau Rouge marks the upper part of the Rue de Clignancourt, and like its surroundings is only the shadow of what was, the feeblest reminiscence of a reputable past ; from the favorite of the better class of revelers it has become the rendezvous and the resort of roughs, male and female, the lowest plane of the city's disreputable characters.

The Chateau Rouge is a dancing-hall, a cheap counterpart of the Bullier, admission one franc, ladies free ; the ladies have bedraggled skirts decorated with the mud of Montmatre.

When a visitor passes in who bears any resemblance to the cleaner classes of society, he quite naturally attracts no little attention ; and if, in the recent history of the place, such a visitor should have happened to be a woman, the attention would have been more marked and the astonishment shown on the face of the

doorkeeper must certainly have been extreme. As it was when a lady presented herself one evening not long before the departure of the Duke from Paris, as noticed in the last chapter, and passed through into the dancing-garden with an air as nonchalant as it was possible for her to make it, though it failed utterly to impress those who noticed her with the idea that she was accustomed to such scenes, every one of the employés and most of the guests followed her with their eyes, and with their tongues as well. The newcomer selected a seat near the entrance from which she could see every one who entered and at the same time watch the dancers beyond. This, it will be seen, is an easy matter when it is remembered that the garden is shaped after the letter L, the short arm representing the entrance path while the dancing was going on in the longer one.

The lady carefully scanned the faces of all who passed, until a man, dressed respectably

and bearing the impress of contact with something better than the present surroundings, took a seat beside her and engaged her in conversation. There is no necessity here for introductions, the conventionalities of a hide-bound society are not recognized by the spirits frequenting the Chateau Rouge, neither are the preliminary manœuvres; the feints and hesitations, which usually accompany a shifting acquaintance, are unnecessary; and the incident of a strange man speaking to a strange woman excited neither notice or comment beyond that occasioned by the clean skirts and neat appearance of the latter.

The couple withdrew before many minutes to a corner toward which the lights conveniently blinded, and the obscurity was made more apparent by the brilliancy about it. The business between them must have been of a nature that demanded great explanation on the part of the woman and undivided attention on that of the man, for had any one

listened to their words there would have been heard the most earnest and explicit directions in a falsetto voice, interrupted occasionally by a controlled grunt of understanding or an inquiry that required a return over the ground the woman had already covered ; but she submitted to the repetition with a mildness that indicated a deep personal interest in having the listener comprehend her every syllable,—a mildness that was unnatural, for an active feminine brain has little patience with a dull masculine mind.

Finally the man was made of one thought with the woman. He was by no means slow of comprehension, nor unwilling to exert every mental power to put himself in a proper condition to earn a reward. That reward appeared in this instance to be the incentive for his close attention, and the small package tied neatly in white paper which he received and carefully put away in his vest pocket, evidently had something to do with the sub-

ject of their conversation and no very distant connection with the pecuniary emoluments arising from the duties he was to perform, whatever they might be.

Quietly the couple left the garden, left the revelers to their revels, and the sleepy ticket-seller to await another victim to his den. Slowly they passed down the street and parted only at the Boulevard de Rochechouart, where the woman could take a tram through the Clichy and thus approach near to her home. The man turned back to his apartment on the Butte, and the two, soon separated by half a city and a million of human beings, were in their particular rooms engrossed in a single purpose and the mental telegraph which sometimes operates in earnest thoughts unconsciously conveyed ideas between them.

VII.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.

THERE is a small town on the very border line between France and Italy, and about half a mile outside the limit of French government, known as Vintimiglia. It is a place of no possible importance excepting as the very first station on Italian soil, the terminus of the French railroad coming from Mentone, the point where cars are changed for Genoa, Florence, and Southern Italy. There is a waiting-room and a telegraph office; the waiting-room is entered from the front, the telegraph office from behind. The road for carriages and wagons starting at the door of the telegraph office extends up a hill where the town, so far as there is any town, is to be found. At one time this point, it is believed, possessed some considerable military import-

ance, but that was so long ago as to reflect no glory upon it to-day.

The scenery between Mentone and Vintimiglia is wonderfully beautiful; mountains extending up to the clouds, it seems, and with faces of ragged and jagged rock perpendicularly rising out of wild and almost impenetrable forests, and at irregular distances giant trees find soil sufficient to sustain them on these stony cliffs. Paths which look like a foothold and are but little more, cross the face of the mountains at a tremendous height, and along this precarious and uncertain ledge the peasants from the district thereabouts hasten with packs or parcels and exchange visits with neighbors in the adjoining country, or should their errands lie at the foot of the cliffs, they descend upon rope ladders hanging against the face of the mountains. These evidences of a daring civilization are picturesque and indicate a hardy and a fearless people.

There are castles upon these mountains that saw the mediæval wars and shielded the knights of invading armies or resisted the encroachments of an enemy ; and now these castles, dismantled, in majestic ruins and moss-covered, are serving their country as telegraph poles : the ever-present cross-arms with the glass conductors are nailed against the tottering walls, and the modern wires tangle with the vines and growths of centuries, detracting very seriously from the romance one might otherwise build about the scene. It is rather difficult to reconcile our idea of the presence of the Goths and Vandals with an accompaniment of nineteenth-century appliances.

It was in the midst of these surroundings that the Count had taken his wife and his mother, rented a delightful little house overlooking the Mediterranean, with capacious grounds about it and a charming garden from which the sea seemed to be close at

hand. Jeanne would sit for hours in the summer-house of this garden reading, crocheting, occupying her mind to the physical advantage of her body, becoming gradually stronger, better, more contented ; the boy she already loved, the Countess she had learned to respect, her husband had shown real devotion in his attentions ; every thought added to her comfort and was born, so it appeared, for her benefit ; he romped with Gaston over the grass and among the flowers, he read the very latest novels to his wife and exhausted the resources of Daudet with a smattering of the lesser and more pungent authors ; he made up short excursions to the forests and mountains where Jeanne could ride and enjoy the scenery, and talk and laugh and look upon life as more promising and worth living after all. The Count made her little presents—trifles bought from the natives thereabouts—pretty evidences of their skill with the penknife, or examples of their appreci-

ation of color, in themselves valueless articles often but precious to Jeanne as tokens of a growing affection, an affection to which she was entitled by her sacrifice, her sweetness, her own love. And the Count had no difficulty in paying these attentions; it was no effort upon his part to show a regard which he began to feel; no need to simulate a tenderness more earnest than that he in reality felt. He was on the verge of falling in love with his wife—"queer Frenchman," one would involuntarily say.

Jeanne, on her part, permitted no opportunity to pass which offered an excuse for showing her love for her husband, not in a pretentious nor an obtrusive way, still less in a supplicating or sentimental manner did she evince this feeling; errors she would never have been guilty of nor the Count allow to attract him. Mrs. Sparks had made use of those agencies in her experiences and they had been successful, but it is extremely doubt-

ful whether Jeanne with her comparative lack of worldly knowledge could have competed with her rival had she adopted the same mode of warfare. It is usually the case when a woman who has no right to it seeks the attention of a man who has no right to give it, that she employs demonstrative means of accomplishing her purpose. Should she be pretty, witty, or possess other qualities which make her company desirable, as it usually is, these tactics appeal to the pride of the man and he succumbs. Jeanne appealed to her husband's honor, Mrs. Sparks to his appetite—the result of such a competition nine times out of ten is foregone.

The boy in Jeanne had found a mother, tender, considerate and kind; he had learned to love her; he called her by endearing names; he seemed unhappy when away from her. The infection of such a spirit in the household is likely to be all-pervading, and it may account in a measure for the ease with which

the boy's father was learning to love. The Count's mother had been the first to catch the inspiration ; in truth, she originated it, for never had daughter-in-law been received more thankfully, more appreciatively than into this very family. The home had become harmonious, happy ; the visiting mother-in-law was well received by the resident mother-in-law ; the Duchesse was improving in health, the balmy breezes of the Mediterranean had brought strength to her again ; the regular living, of which she had been deprived for so long, was a valuable ingredient in the recuperating prescription ; there appeared to be one of those sudden changes in fortune when everything transpires just as it should, and every one feels a joyous buoyancy with the thought that something further of the same nature is about to happen, without having any defined suspicion what it is to be, and after the day or the week or the month has gone it is still impossible to say what it was

or whether it ever occurred. Such hallucinations have been known to exist for several days, as a rule they are limited to a few hours.

This was the state of affairs when the Duke reached Vintimiglia.

VIII.

THE TWO ACCOMPLICES.

WHEN an old gentleman has been released from the burdens of supporting the style of a past generation in the city and relaxes his mind and limbs in the country, he is very liable to be frolicsome and juvenile until the strangeness of the situation wears off ; this is particularly the case when the old gentleman in question has accomplished the conquest of a particularly bright and charming lady whose heart he is conscious of possessing, although he may be separated from her by great distances.

Influenced by the bracing air of the mountains and the joyfulness of his own mind, the Duke spent his days in flitting about from one point to another and indulging in such frequent and often such questionable

jokes that the Duchesse took occasion to declare against the very evident dissipation that it betokened, and jocosely upbraided her husband for assumed waywardness since she had been absent from Paris, when in truth the idea of such a charge having any ground to stand upon never entered her innocent soul. The Duke, however, nearly admitted the breach of decorum by his earnestness in disputing it, although it was with a perceptible degree of pride that he heard the charge made and by the employment of various little tricks and subterfuges he led his wife back to the subject frequently, so that the friends might learn of his capacity for being wicked even though he might deny his guilt.

The Duke was a good man ; he loved his daughter and his wife, and their happiness was his own ; he had his peculiarities—many of them—yet they were not of the obtrusive sort ; he would persist in wiping the napkin over his plate at the table after turning it at

an angle with the light so as to discover any neglect by the maid ; he insisted upon fruit out of season upon the claim that enjoyment was entirely a process of the imagination, and while no one really found pleasure in the biting cold of December or the intolerable heat of August, yet in winter one could conjure the possible advantages of summer, of sitting beneath the genial shade of an olive or wandering on the flowered bank of a favorite brook, but to attune the mind to such a contemplation one must be reclining before a crackling fire, one must hear at the same moment the wind howling without and be conscious that a heavy snow is upon the ground, and above all, one must be eating strawberries while his thoughts are busy with such scenes. These were idiosyncrasies bringing harm to no one and a considerable quantity of hallucinated comfort to the gentleman himself.

A few days after the Duke's arrival he brought to the house a man whom he said

had come to him highly recommended by a friend at Paris as a competent and efficient waiter, and knowing that the Count wished such help he was thus presented as an applicant. Two very important points were not referred to, one of which the Duke was cognizant, the "friend in Paris" was Mrs. Sparks; the other, of which the Duke was ignorant, the waiter was the man met by that lady at the Chateau Rouge.

The man was presentable and seemed to possess many qualifications for the position; he was humble and obliging—ubiquitously so—insinuating and attentive. His ability to arrange the table during the meal, rid it of crumbs and float his napkin in the face of the guests at the very moment when some delicious dish appealed to their attention, was developed to that degree of perfection that would qualify him for a first-rate waitership in one of the best of the boulevard restaurants.

The boulevard waiters, by the way, have

their oddities and yet they are a type of the class throughout the world ; the business, or trade, or profession, or whatever its followers choose to term it, has been dragged down from the days of Ganymedes, until it rests upon the very subsoil of human nature. A waiter, from ranking with the gods has become a meddling, hanging-about, fee-expectant, blackmailing nuisance ; he pawns his manhood for a sou and makes no pretence of redeeming it ; is distinguished from the beggar who accosts us on the street only in his capacity to give us greater annoyance ; we purchase his groveling attention daily for a score of years by the bestowal of a small copper coin, and should we one day neglect to provide ourselves with this diurnal offering, he will leave us to get into our overcoat alone and ignore our very existence, wherein he is as the rest of the world, though quicker ; he polishes his soiled face with the napkin he uses later upon the plates, and should a sud-

den shower make it necessary to lower the awnings before the Café de la Paix, he utilizes the same napkin in removing the drops caught upon his neck and clothes ; he stands at our chair and looks and sighs and moves the glasses, and does a multitude of other things designed to attract our thoughts to his physical presence and his personal poverty. Still we give him his sou for policy, it guarantees hot soup and relieves him of the necessity of putting sand in our coffee ; we leave, glad to get away from him, and he sees us go equally glad to be rid of us. There is a modesty withal about the waiter that keeps him from asserting his independence outside his restaurant, and excepting when he is occasionally arrested for murdering one of his wives in a fit of jealousy, he is an unassuming tyrant.

Has any one noticed the peaceful eccentricities of the waiter ? There is a tautological one (if such may be its title) in the unneces-

sary repetition of a word ; for example, in ordering the substantial course at table d'hôte, the waiter invariably repeats the numeral of the order, as "deux roti, deux," or "trois roti, trois," as the case may be, or when he calls for that most delicious of French desserts, it is "Poire Condé, poire." He loses his balance unless his words run their course. With these few exceptions the waiter is void of romance and without interest as a study in natural history.

Such a man was Louis St. Martin, introduced by Mrs. Sparks, advocated by the Duke, and now attendant upon the Count. His evil propensities, if he had any, he carefully concealed ; he was ever-present, watchful and attentive, and within a week from the day he became one of the household, he had ingratiated himself so completely into the favor of his employers that they looked upon him as an exceptional servant and themselves as particularly favored.

Jeanne, who had found in the invigorating air of the mountains such exhilaration of mind, of a sudden lost her animation and became moody, melancholy, and despondent; the tenderest attentions from her friends failed to raise the lethargy that had settled upon her, and the saddest days since her marriage, those when she learned that her husband had wedded her for merely selfish and, in a measure, commercial reasons, showed no plainer marks of despair than those now limned upon her face. The recovery of her physical health was not retarded by the condition of her mind; she increased in flesh; she gathered strength; it seemed to be as they all could wish excepting the terrible, the wearing melancholy of her face. Why had this sudden change come upon her? It was inexplicable; it had appeared only since the advent of Louis, yet what possible influence could Louis have with Jeanne?

In truth, this question never occurred to

them; the coming of the waiter was in no way connected in their thoughts with the unhappy condition of the patient, either chronologically or otherwise. Was not Louis an ordinary servant in a very ordinary position, and was Jeanne a woman to be influenced from such a source? It seemed that her mind was poisoned against her husband; she avoided him; she unconsciously shrank away when he approached, and gave many other involuntary evidences that she had learned to dread him. It was impossible to disguise such repugnance and he was sorely perplexed for an explanation; his words had expressed nothing but kindness, and his actions were prompted only by her wishes and intended to result in some sort of pleasure to her; he rejoiced at her returning health and had already laid plans for their enjoyment when they should leave Vintimiglia. Her treatment surprised and pained him; he sought vainly for a solution; she denied the charge when

he questioned her, and then she turned from him with an effort so illy disguised to control the evidence of her abhorrence as to give denial to the reply.

Suspicion is seldom a successful detective ; it shapes events to correspond with its hastily formed opinions and loses sight of the bearing these same events would have if considered without prejudice. Suspicion in a woman is disposed to be final ; its very existence is generally an assurance to the female mind of its truth, else, it is urged, why should it be born ?

Jeanne had every reason for the most gloomy thoughts, whatever they might be ; the Count had taken no care to nourish his early feelings toward her in secret and this memory was too recent to be dissipated by his later kindly acts. An ungenerous disposition when once exposed, is not readily atoned for even by later evidences of the most unselfish interest.

But what could be the subject of Jeanne's thoughts? This question ever uppermost with him, he had sought vainly to answer; he had shown her the most careful attention, he had urged that she regularly and carefully follow the daily prescriptions of the physician; he had noted with satisfaction the benefits of those remedies and their help to her returning strength. He marked her hesitancy in accepting the medicines and the reluctance with which she received his advice; he argued with her neglect, and urged her to be more careful of the directions given only for her own good; he could divine no reason other than the natural one which prompts every one to decline noxious doses that would inspire her to such vigorous objections, and he sought to persuade her that children only permitted such considerations to stand in the way of healthful efforts; he exhausted his fund of argument that she might do as he wished. He persisted with a persistency

that must have been prompted by the purest or the vilest motives, and Jeanne finally understood it thus, for she recommenced upon the draughts prepared for her; she no longer threw them upon the ground as had been her wont, but she sought her husband at each recurrence of the hour and only in his presence would she force upon herself the objectionable dose; and as he saw her his face would brighten and he would look happier for the rest of the day; while her spirits would sink lower and she would weep and withdraw to the seclusion of her room, devoured, it seemed, with the unhappiest thoughts, although to learn their import was a task beyond the power of those about her.

One day she had been unusually sad, unusually reserved; the Countess, the Duke, her father, and the Duchesse, her mother, together with the Doctor and her husband, were enjoying the breezes and the views from the charming kiosk upon the grounds, when

Louis brought the mixture ordered by the physician. Slowly Jeanne carried the goblet to her lips, looking withal at her husband with an earnest, hopeful, almost supplicating and finally a rebellious expression as she saw the Count permitted her to drink with no protest and no effort to stay her hand. Then her feelings could be no longer repressed, 'twas impossible to control her passion, and swallowing half the contents of the glass she pushed the goblet toward the Doctor crying in a voice wavering with excitement, that the liquid was poison forced upon her by her husband that she might the sooner die; and, gathering all her scorn and strength into her words, she poured them forth in a volume of recrimination until exhausted, unnerved and hopeless she sank upon the ground unconscious before their startled and astonished eyes.

IX.

HER TRIP SOUTH.

MRS. SPARKS had received strange reports from Louis. Since her parting with him at the railroad station her days had been made up of excitement and she had abandoned even the diverting society of her admirers, so unsettled and nervous had she become. She sought every opportunity for solitude and thought: she must think, or she must die! She had taken a step that would affect her whole life; she must brood over it and talk to herself of it; the attentions and converse of others were insufferable. Interruption from her husband she did not fear; experience had given him infallible signs by which to discover when his presence was opportune and when on the other hand it was least desirable. These signs were never marked

with greater clearness than at this very moment when every one of them pointed toward his own seclusive chambers, and taught to observe unquestioned the mute commands of his wife, he withdrew to them.

His wife had long since disposed of him in her mind and his unobtrusive, harmless existence was measured by that of the struggling girl at Vintimiglia, the girl of whose importance he knew nothing, of whose very being he was probably in total ignorance.

Mrs. Sparks heard from Louis with considerable frequency, and the reports were such as to gratify and encourage her. Yet Louis was not her only means of information: she had corresponded with the Duke regularly, and from him had learned much that helped her to determine the actual condition of affairs in this small Italian town. The Duke's letters breathed of his devotion, passion exuded from every stroke of his pen and all subjects which might be hinted at ever so obscurely in

his words finally led to the absorbing topic of his love. Mrs. Sparks would impatiently run through these lines ; she could barely restrain the impulse to respond to the old man as her feelings dictated, or to ignore him altogether, but she was desirous of information that the Duke could give her and which he did give her, although it came in exceedingly small quantities and acted a part so emphatically secondary to his protestations of affection as to make it hardly worth her search.

However, the correspondence was continued and from it Mrs. Sparks learned of Jeanne's peculiar melancholy, of her aversion for the Count, of her strange condition apparently failing while still unmistakably gathering flesh and strength ; she learned of the devotion shown by Louis and the confidence placed in him by every member of the family. All that the Duke did write substantiated the more business-like and much more welcome accounts sent by her accomplice. She had

heard nothing from the Count directly, but this did not surprise her; she knew that so long as Jeanne lived she need expect no attention from him which would in any degree encroach upon the rights of his wife.

Mrs. Sparks had remained passive heretofore; her contribution to the scheme she had set on foot consisted of the ideas; upon Louis devolved the labor, and upon the Duke, unconsciously, the task of keeping her fresh in the mind of the Count by frequent and flattering allusions to her attractive qualities and her enchanting manners. Now, however, the moment had arrived for her to take an active part; advices from her two emissaries told her of the sensational scene accompanying the discovery that Jeanne had been poisoned, and the consternation with which every one heard the startling accusation of her husband. They both told of it, but how different was their tone! Louis expressed fear that the belief in the criminality of the Count might be

dissipated by an investigation, while the Duke, compelled for once to make love subservient to facts, filled his letter with the most vigorous denunciation of his son-in-law and expressed the hope that Jeanne might recover (although that indeed appeared unlikely), and that her husband might be punished for this most infamous of crimes.

The Duke unquestionably believed in the guilt of the Count, and it was not unreasonable for Mrs. Sparks to draw the conclusion that this feeling was entertained by all those who had been present at the time Jeanne so tragically declared her suspicions. So long as her participation was not suspected and Louis escaped being drawn into it, she felt reasonably contented, and while she would have preferred that the use of poison had been a secret until after Jeanne's death at any rate, yet as it had become known it had fortunately assumed such a complexion as promised to free her entirely from any danger

of discovery, and attaching to the Count the infamy of having poisoned his wife, would serve to place him largely in her power. She pictured him when deserted by friends, scorned and avoided by acquaintances, turning to her in his loneliness as the only friendly hand held out to welcome him, hers the only door open to receive him.

All this, however, brought her back to her original position—Jeanne must die ; this necessity arose as the *sine qua non* of every proposition : it was the stepping-stone to all her projects, the one chapter that was alike in all the volumes outlined in her mind for her future life. There was one more effort she seemed called upon to make, to the best of her unaided judgment it appeared desirable that she should be near to Louis. Such action would serve her in a double sense, she would be so situated that it might be possible for her to approach the Count to revive the influence she once had over his life ; and while

encouraging Louis to the consummation of the plot, be in a position to take advantage of its first success.

Mrs. Sparks was forced to the necessity of making up her own mind without the aid of foreign advice, that much-vaunted assistant useless or disregarded in the majority of cases and only partially followed in the balance. Yet it is a satisfaction to the mind to seek the stamp of approval upon its deductions from other thoughtful brains. Whether this approval be required by one as an assurance of his own correct reasoning seldom enters into the proposition; the advice is sought with the idea of avoiding the feeling of isolation which comes without it, and when received if it agrees with the judgment already formed there is applause; but, upon the other hand, if it is opposed, the sneer is unmistakable. In offering advice the adviser assumes the risk of being called a fool and that, too, without any prospective compensating profit.

Mrs. Sparks was far ahead of her generation in the ideas that inspired her independence, and so she was able to smother her temporary desire for sympathy and prepare to leave Paris for the South without delay. The preparations she had to make were so few that they were completed before the close of the day, and with the simplest directions to her husband, acknowledged with all the servility of which he was capable, she left him and the city over the same route taken by the Duke and Louis and journeyed toward Vintimiglia with all the speed of an express. She stopped for an hour or two at Marseilles, strolled about the spacious plaza surrounding the station and studied the proportions of the enormous convent upon the opposite hill ; she wandered along the dusty road a few rods, and then retracing her steps to the depot, she followed the Boulevard du Nord Dugomier to the flower-market at the corner of the Allée de Meilhan, and thence by the

Rue Cannebiere to those immense basins where lie the shipping that gives Marseilles its importance.

Her mind was now too much occupied with thoughts of her approaching trials to notice the peculiarities of the country through which she was passing. Nice was left far behind, and Monaco, Monte Carlo, and Mentone followed each other in quick succession. At the latter place she found it necessary to change cars for the short train here made up to carry through passengers between the last town in France and the first town in Italy. This, however, was the interruption of a few moments only, and very soon she was whirling along between the romantic heights lining the way of the road.

With what thoughts could she have stepped from her compartment when Vintimiglia was proclaimed! What must have been the passion that ruled her mind! How she must have envied the moment when she would be

leaving the place and the result of her work, whether it be for or against her, would be known and would have been accomplished. The mental strain that she felt, but so admirably concealed, would make an unsuccessful conclusion were the other denied her preferable to the wearing anxiety of uncertainty.

X.

THE COUNT RELIEVED.

LOUIS in the meantime had prepared himself to meet Mrs. Sparks, and hoped by putting forward other efforts than those already attempted he might be able to make a report worthy of his errand. Since the discovery Jeanne had made he found little opportunity to use the poison, although he had several times endeavored to do so as boldly as he felt was safe and still avoid absolute detection. The results, however, were most unpromising; Jeanne continued to improve and Mrs. Sparks drew nearer every hour. Finally, in the very fever of uncertainty and the resolution born of a knowledge that something, however desperate, must be done Louis, unconscious that Dr. Cold watched him from a convenient and hidden corner, mixed in the glass containing

a remedy of the Doctor's prescribing a quantity of arsenic as would promise to an impatient heir the speediest solution of his doubts, and then glancing in every direction to know that he was escaping unseen, he carefully stepped aside into the capacious butler's pantry and disappeared in the neighborhood of the kitchen. The mistake Louis made was one common to evil-doers—all his shrewdness was called forth after the deed and was brought forward to aid in his escape, while, unfortunately for him, he had neglected to exert a share of that watchfulness as a preliminary precaution against any one witnessing his act rather than his movements after the act. This oversight gave the Doctor an opportunity of detecting him and following into the room as he stepped into the pantry.

It was not many minutes before Dr. Cold was in his own chamber and examining the contents of the glass, the whole story was made plain to him so soon as he detected

Louis mixing the powder with Jeanne's medicine. He had never known anything of the connection between Louis and Mrs. Sparks, but being acquainted with all the particulars of the Count's affairs, he naturally drew conclusions which showed that lady in the light of a woman with a grievance, and a reason as well as a purpose in ridding herself of a living obstacle to the attainment of her understood wishes. There was little doubt in his mind as to the justice of his reasoning; he felt that he was right in his conclusions and every moment's consideration strengthened this feeling. The detection of arsenic in the glass was a comparatively easy matter, and with it the entire secret of Jeanne's wonderful recovery and yet depressed condition of mind was made clear; he knew that under certain conditions arsenic if used in quantities sufficient was a cure for consumption, but the uncertainty of finding the proper condition on the part of the patient and the

added danger in using the quantity of poison necessary, place obstacles in the way of employing this remedy that render the knowledge of it practically useless. If it were possible to utilize, or if it were safe to take advantage of the curative qualities in arsenic, many cases of consumption now fatal might be ultimately cured.

The Doctor hesitated as to the best course for him to follow, whether it were better to denounce the fellow openly before the family, and thus clear the Count to every one who heard the awful charges of his wife ; or whether, on the other hand, to make the discovery known only to Jeanne and leave it to her woman-wit to explain away the apparent culpability of her husband. The objection to the first plan was clear, inasmuch as it would acquaint the Duchesse with an incident in the marriage of which she was now ignorant and it was desirable that she should remain so, while the additional disagreeable

feature of opening an old and a most unsavory subject, led the Doctor to the very reasonable resolve to consult Jeanne herself and act as she might consider best in the case.

Taking advantage of the privileges accorded a physician, the Doctor sought Jeanne in her room and in the plainest, most direct words unfolded the plot to her as he saw it, referring to Mrs. Sparks' necessary connection with it and relying upon the good common-sense of his listener neither to shun the fullest details of the association between her husband and his former infatuation, nor to avoid a discussion of the very powerful reasons she would have for wishing her, Jeanne, out of the world.

It was such a well-developed case that the Doctor had little difficulty in bringing the wife to his way of thinking, and while it is a feeling by no means conducive to comfort to know there is an enemy seeking one's life, yet it is far better that the seeking be act-

uated by the spirit with which Mrs. Sparks was filled than by the promptings of a husband, and Jeanne so fully realized this that she was tempted to give way to rather extravagant demonstrations of joy even before she had applied the final test to the suspicion—interviewing Louis, which, of course, occurred to her at once upon the recital of the Doctor's terrible story.

It was quite an ordinary message that to Louis to go to his mistress' room, and the presence of the Doctor did not for a moment disconcert him ; but suspicion or an uncomfortable sensation of gathering trouble came to him when the Doctor locked the door and directed him to take a seat. He was then treated to a short discourse upon the various means employed in detecting the different poisons and very simple explanations of how the presence of arsenic, for example, might be determined ; these explanations being accompanied by a working out of the solution

before Louis' own eyes, with an absolute conviction to his mind that the glass being shown him contained with its apparently harmless medicine, a sufficient quantity of arsenic to kill a healthy person—the Doctor did not say it was also sufficient to cure an unhealthy one.

Then without indicating in his words or manner the slightest doubt or hesitancy as to the absolute certainty of his question, the Doctor very abruptly asked Louis how he could have so far forgotten his personal safety as to embark in any such vicious piece of work, and especially at the persuasion and in the pay of a person so uncertain as Mrs. Sparks. The Doctor, before giving his thoroughly frightened hearer an opportunity for reply, followed up his queries with a hint that his participation in the crime had long been known and the delay in accusing him had been brought about merely by the search for evidence to criminate his accomplice. It

was very natural that in Louis' mind the conclusion would be reached that this evidence had been procured, and with Mrs. Sparks certainly powerless and possibly in the hands of the law his only hope lay in making an acknowledgment of the offence, an explanation of the entire affair so far as his knowledge extended and throwing himself, figuratively, on their mercy.

When an accomplice begins to confess, especially when he has any suspicion that his confession is number two instead of bearing the simpler preceding numeral, there is generally a volubility of accusations that overwhelms the poor listener and appals him by the cold-blooded recital; not necessarily because it is cold-blooded, but because it is told in such haste and with such particular regard for details, all prompted by the fear that anything short of a veritable carnival of crime will be discredited. The care with which a confession is crowded with situations

and the anxiety on the part of the narrator that every protest should be understood, is positively distressing and Louis, reconvinced with every word that he was talking for his life, piled up his facts, criminating himself and Mrs. Sparks alone and adding such proof of the Count's innocence as quite to convince and delight Jeanne. It was her first impulse to go to her husband and acknowledge the wrong she had done him, but the Doctor, who had divined her thought, whispered to her that he had other plans and better, he believed, which he would explain after they had finished with Louis.

But Louis had finished with himself; he had exhausted his information; there was nothing further that he could tell. Why Mrs. Sparks wished to make away with Jeanne was a question it had never occurred to him to ask; he was working for a stated sum, and it was sufficient for him to know that the punishment awaiting him, if discov-

ered, would be just precisely the same whether the reasons held by his employer were valid or useless. He knew and cared nothing beyond a possibility of reaching ten thousand francs. So he made no attempt at an explanation which would cover this phase of the case, he merely dropped his head, disposed of his hands very clumsily, and remained silent until a few words from the Doctor dismissed him, but with the injunction that he make no attempt to leave the town.

The Doctor's reasons for withholding the particulars of the plot from the Count were frankly given to Jeanne. He considered that the information would create such a feeling of indignation within him that he would forget the prudence the singular circumstances surrounding the case should inspire and would publish the scandal by his own words, assuring a publicity which might by careful management be avoided. The same argument was good as against the prosecution of Louis;

it were far better to allow him to escape punishment than furnish the papers with gossip by causing his arrest; he unquestionably would seek Mrs. Sparks at once and acquaint her with the discovery; this might serve to put an end to her scheming hopes, and insure, at least, an armed peace thereafter.

XI.

MURDER!

It was not necessary for Jeanne to explain anything to her husband ; it was all-sufficient that her action toward him should be more wifely and more devoted than it had been for many weeks. The Count, with that knowledge of the female character which comes from an extended acquaintance with the sex, attributed her changed conduct to a freak similar in its kind but agreeably different in its result to that from which she had just been freed ; he was so happy in the new phase of her feelings that the thought of going into an investigation as to the cause was not for a moment entertained. Within twenty-four hours from the time Louis had confessed his attempted crime there was not a more loving

couple in the country than Jeanne and the Count.

Louis on his part had sought some relief from a distracted mind in exercise, and walked rapidly down the road that led to the town. The more he thought the faster he walked, and yet the faster he walked the less possibility there seemed to be of escaping his thoughts. His brain worked in unison with his legs. He was too deep in the consideration of his faults and what he was pleased to term his troubles, to notice the lady who, veiled and with a parasol held closely over her head, passed him, stopped, turned, and called his name.

It seemed natural that this voice should interrupt his reverie: 'twas to this woman who accosted him that he attached all the blame for his present position; her name, her face were uppermost in his mind. It was no surprise in his excited condition that Mrs. Sparks should be in Vintimiglia; had his cooler self

been in control he might have wondered at her presence ; he would have speculated as to its object and possibly found in it a menace to himself. As it happened, however, he was in that inflamed state when nothing could surprise him and the most unnatural event would seem to be the most commonplace.

At the sound of his name he turned and without a word of preface or greeting he recounted the happenings of the morning ; he told how everything had been discovered ; that they stood then practically convicted by his own confession of a most outrageous and infamous offence ; he enlarged upon the danger menacing them and finally told her of his promise to the Doctor not to leave the town without proper permission to do so, a promise, he continued, of which he should seek to be relieved and urged Mrs. Sparks to leave with him that very day. Disappointed, surprised, and hopeless, she felt it were best to retrace her steps, and with no

other comment than an illy-repressed sigh, Mrs. Sparks told Louis she would return to Paris that night and he was at liberty to return with her.

And then, as if a second thought presented itself, she motioned Louis to accompany her. Wrapped in the gloomiest thoughts the confederates and allies speechless, one from fear, the other from baffled hatred and needless crime, directed their steps toward a clump of trees that could be seen at the terminus of a branching road and not more than an eighth of a mile distant.

Flowers blossomed at every side and the radiance of their tints, the sweet aroma they spread upon the air made the path inviting even to the guilty thoughts of those two wanderers. Great trees spread their rich leaves above and bearing bushes borne down with wealth of luscious berries sprang from the mellow soil.

Nature was at her best, the skies were of

the clearest, the breezes came with the softness of the snow and each breath was freighted with relief for parched mankind; nothing was wanting to make the hour more lovely or the time more restful for the human mind. 'Twas such a day as mid-summer gives when most disposed to favor those who revel in her warmth; 'twas such a day as should dispel all evil cravings and discourage foul-faced crime in all the world.

And yet upon this day, stopping now and then abstractedly to pluck a daisy or a wild-rose from the ground, Mrs. Sparks coldly and unflinchingly went her way planning the surest means of accomplishing, even at this stage, all that she had laid out to do ere she ventured upon the succession of crimes that marked the past few weeks and aimed at the life of an unoffending fellow-being. The flowers she tore impatiently apart, she crushed the odorous petals in her clenched fists and bore her heel deep into the yield-

ing soil at every step; tempestuous violence was marked in each movement, and as she flung the mutilated shrub aside 'twas with a nervous and a vicious air that showed too well the anger stirring in her heart.

Louis silently and sullenly followed with less outward sign of feeling; with him there weighed no sentiment to heap fuel on the flames of disappointment; his sting of defeat was caused only by the loss of a promised reward,—it was as though any other speculation went astray; he had put in his time and his life, the latter merely incidentally however, against his employer's ten thousand francs and failed to realize; he had lost, it's true, he felt galled, outraged, swindled by Nature, he was sore with the loss; he had counted upon the cash as his, he was absolutely as sure of it as though it were in his own pocket or had gone to purchase for him an interest in the Chateau Rouge, he had never permitted a doubt to enter his mind

as to its possession, he had looked upon himself as a capitalist to the extent of ten thousand francs ; after the money was promised he considered it earned, the simple process of acquiring it by labor was to him not worthy a moment's thought,—it had been guaranteed, that was the great obstacle overcome.

The world is full of just such people as Louis, people who crave an object, and the very craving assures acquirement, in their mind ; or having an agreement with employers for a certain sum contingent upon certain work, they count the imaginary dollars in their trembling brain—and fail to earn them. Such men live ever in the future, subsisting in ease of body and of mind upon the yet-to-be-attained profits of a lively anticipation.

And so this queer team trudged on, trudged, sighed, groaned, swore, but still they trudged, and finally reaching the clump of sheltering trees Mrs. Sparks turned savagely and fiercely

on her companion, poured forth the uncorked venom of a year's control, stamped her shapely foot and shook her fist, that white and powerless fist, at imaginary foes whose faces she saw upon the sky.

'Twould have gone hard with the Duke had he chanced that way at the moment.

And her fury spent itself. 'Twas like the cyclone, destructive for a moment, and then, 'twas calm.

Again she turned upon Louis, but this time there was moderation in her voice and wisdom in her utterances. Rapidly she recited their failure, the loss both had suffered, the money that might have been his, the luxury and ease it would have brought him, the opportunity to see foreign parts and means to wed that buxom ticket-seller at the Garden. If ever female Faust toyed by means of golden baubles with a masculine Marguerite, Mrs. Sparks played that shrewd and seductive part in true perfection.

Nor did she stop at the promise of reward and the vision of luxury to be gained by the possession of wealth ; she played upon his fears, his doubts, his timidity ; she pictured the punishment of attempted crime and showed the dangers encompassing him even in the failure of his plot. What if the Count should know of it ? Would he be so ready to conceal the circumstances, would he shield a murderer for the sake of secrecy ? And what relief would Louis seek in the event of prosecution ? (she put it "persecution"). Had he the means to leave the country, had he even the wherewithal to make defence ?

These questions found distressful answers in Louis' soul ; he realized the slippery ground on which he stood ; he was sufficiently familiar with law, and French law in particular, to recognize the insecurity of his position and the uncertainty of his neck, or at the least his liberty. He pondered upon this while Mrs. Sparks talked and as she ceased with a final

and contemptuous hiss that was intended to be directed to Jeanne and a cowardly world, but was appropriated in all its meaning by her frightened listener, he leapt from the log upon which he had been sitting listlessly kicking at the sod and in a voice that left no doubt of earnestness, declared his willingness to return to the cottage and complete his work if some plan could be devised that would permit it; he loudly affirmed his temerity, his courage, his absolute indifference to consequences, and the while his limbs trembled as though he already stood upon the guillotine and saw the vision of another life pictured upon the air.

He had none of the stamina belonging to a great criminal; his courage was of a low order; it was a mean, spasmodic courage, prompted by the sight of a golden incentive, and liable to whine and whimper in the presence of discovery. Still, he had embarked in the undertaking; he had already gone far

enough to entitle him to life servitude if not to the severer penalty, and he had just sufficient nerve left to make another effort ; and as he signified his willingness to do it, he stood in meek expectancy awaiting the comments of his abler conspirator.

Mrs. Sparks was too far wrought up to hesitate and in her most impassioned manner she poured forth a volume of suggestions, directions, commands, that fairly took away the breath of the absorbent Louis and caused his stubby and scanty hair to perpendicularize itself. She flaunted the sanguinary rag in his very face ; she almost committed murder on her companion in her excitement ; she became so infuriated in her very thoughts that her words flowed one into the other with undistinguishable confusion, and she was often forced to interrupt the continuity of her recital by the inability of Louis to catch her meaning, or by her own lack of breath.

They sat upon a mossy stump and as she

talked Louis studied the grass, bent a willow twig between his fingers, pushed his hat back upon his head, softly whistled and paid strict attention to her words. If his confession to the Doctor had been a carnival of crime, hers was now a bloodthirsty and callous recital of the most atrocious ideas that ever blotted the mind of man or escaped from the revengeful heart of woman.

Nor were her comments brief; she dwelt upon each particular, and fearful that his comprehension would not grasp the eccentricities of the task, she enlarged and revelled in the murderous enterprise and summed it up in the final direction that Louis take a phial she drew from her pocket and pressed into his hand.

'Twas Prussic acid and in its potent drops there lurked destruction for a score of enemies; no mercy could be extracted from that relentless bit of fluid, no curative virtue dwelt beneath the confining stopper. It was

sure death this time and Mrs. Sparks intended there should be no unconscious philanthropy in the dosing. She wanted Louis to revisit the house at once, quickly, before Doctor Cold should have forgotten his caution and proclaimed the situation to the wind; and when there to pour the poison in Jeanne's glass, her coffee, her medicine, anything she would be likely to eat or to drink; if she but tasted the mixture, it was all that would be necessary.

Mrs. Sparks never gave thought to the unusual risk this new move meant; she was desperate and she was alone, practically alone for Louis counted as an exceedingly small item in her thoughts; there was nothing near her to excite her fear or apprehension. The solitude of the place, the absolute quiet of the woods, the absence of humankind, it all made her reckless of results. And besides, she was not of the cool and calculating sort; she plunged rather than waded in; she never

hesitated when once the prompting came for good or bad act ; she did it and she pondered on it afterward.

Such is the disposition that has made the world, the impulsive, the quick to temper or to kindly deed, those who are easily imposed upon, who are ever ready to resent and equally ready to forgive, it is from men and women of those promptings that great things may be expected, permanent great things ; perhaps they may not personally benefit or suffer by them,—but the world will. If these promptings be pure, so much the better ; if they be evil—so much the worse.

The cold-blooded man who never permits a word to escape him that is not capable of conversion into some other meaning, who never writes a syllable that is not copied ere it leaves his hand, who never makes a promise or gives an opinion without a season of laborious gestation, who employs a mental midwife at the birth of every idea, who regards

deliberation as wisdom, that man may accomplish something for himself, but he will pass from earth without leaving any memory of his deeds and without having done that which would benefit the mind or body of any one left behind him.

If his inclinations tend toward murder he will succeed in being hanged early in the game.

With violent passions Mrs. Sparks had extreme feelings; when not swayed by anger she was either in the most buoyant and brilliant good humor or in the most desperate and dejected despair; in either she indulged in unmeasured condemnation and hopeless predictions or in extravagant anticipations of an impossible future. When every day appeared bright and no trouble crossed her skies she sneered at those who felt that life was tiresome, and claimed when her burden became an irksome one she would relieve it by suicide without making it a subject of com-

plaint. But when that day arrived her theories were no support in her despondency and she lacked the courage to break the bonds that attached her to the world. She wanted to die, but at the vital moment she decided that old age were a calmer means of death than the stiletto or the poisoned cup.

Now she was in her furious mood : whatever came was welcome ; her own life was nothing in the balance 'gainst revenge ; the life of Louis was still less, in fact she looked upon him as a thing rather than a creature, he was an ever-present reminder of the happiness arising from the condition of being a fool and unconscious of it.

But Louis was not an ordinary fool, he was of the avaricious type and being so he lost no time in setting out for the scene of his late villainy and his future crime. With the strong bottle tightly clutched in his pocket he hastened along the road ; he stopped not, neither did he turn to either side, and Mrs.

Sparks followed him with her eyes until he passed from sight, then she threw herself upon the grass and wept in the paroxysms of her disappointed rage.

That's the consequence in women !

.

The Doctor was somewhat surprised to see Louis come back to the house, but when he questioned him upon his wanderings about the village and the object of his return, Louis gave such humble and contrite replies and such positive assurance of his speedy packing and departure for the north, that the Doctor was thrown quite off his guard and permitted the fellow to go around the place unmolested and unwatched.

Louis made the most of his opportunity ; he prepared his few goods for removal ; he avoided the Count, for that party not being acquainted with the tragic side of his services

knew nothing of the waiter's discharge and was to be left with the impression that the man quietly and without reason had surrendered the position voluntarily.

There was little life in the grounds that afternoon; the aged Duke dozed upon the lounge in his own bed-room; the siesta of the Duchesse was taken beneath the shade of an olive tree in the garden; the Countess had retired to her apartment, and the Count with Jeanne had strolled over in the direction of a gypsy encampment upon an opposite hill.

It was a delightful afternoon and murder seemed out of place in such a sunshine; there was nothing in the atmosphere that would turn the thoughts to desperate deeds. Louis felt the influence of the day and as he realized that it would weaken his nerve and bring his timorous instincts to the hindrance of his undertaking, he hastened to complete the mission he had embarked upon.

Through the avenue of trees that led to the

distant road Louis saw the Count and Jeanne approaching. They strolled along the grassy path in perfect freedom from disturbing thought, and with their arms entwined about each other as lovers, not wedded couples, are wont to do. They were earnest in their conversation and bent willing and anxious ears to their mutual utterances. Every moment they came nearer and every moment the chance was lessening for Louis' success.

Noiselessly he stole into the cottage, and with a stealthy step he sought Jeanne's dressing-room where he knew the goblet of medicine would be found. Nor was he mistaken, for there upon the dressing-case a glass half filled with a milk-white liquid stood as the Doctor had prepared it a few hours before.

This time there were no intruders upon his crime near by, no watchful eye marked his actions and no danger lurked behind the unclosed door; he was alone; his most careful scrutiny satisfied him of that and as he drew

the precious bottle from its concealment, he looked again about him with great bulging eyes and fearful longing on his face, as though he felt a hand upon his shoulder and heard the voice of justice ringing in his ears.

Quickly he stepped to the window and loosened the cork from its imprisonment; he poured the contents of the phial into the glass before him.

But hark! A step; the sound of a footfall in the adjoining room; a soft sound, as though whoever it was approaching had muffled feet to conceal their coming.

Cold and clammy, with the perspiration of alarm and fright, Louis sprang into the hall and on the stairs. He stopped when thus at a safe distance and watched the coming of whoever it might be.

The steps came nearer and nearer, and in a moment there toddled into the room from the bed-chamber beyond, the little boy, the child of all this strife, Mrs. Sparks' child, the boy

to whom Jeanne had been a mother, and for whom she might have sacrificed her life.

The young one stared about, rubbing his eyes with his little fists; he made his slow way toward the window from whence he caught sight of Jeanne and his father coming over the lawn. He pounded the pane with his hands and laughed and shouted when responsive signs showed him that his own had been observed. Turning to greet his parents at the door, his eye caught sight of the milky mixture near him. Thirsty from his prolonged nap, he seized the goblet and before the startled and horrified exclamation from Louis could be borne the distance, he drained it to the bottom.

A shriek that sounded as though it might be the tearing asunder of every vein in the delicate body, rang through the house; the goblet crashed to the floor and the boy fell dead upon its splinters. The Doctor, aroused from his writings, rushed forth from his closet

in time to see Louis leaping down the stairs and bursting from the house. A glance was sufficient to show the death, and the cause was apparent in the broken goblet.

By the time the Count and Jeanne reached the room the Doctor had laid the boy upon the bed he had left but a few moments before, and giving no explanation of either the occurrence or his own actions he left the house and followed as rapidly as he could the direction Louis had taken.

.

It was hours to Mrs. Sparks as she waited in the little clump of woods and strained her eyes toward the distant house of the man for whom she had risked so much. She paced up and down the narrow path; she enacted in her mind the scene that was at that moment perhaps transpiring almost within reach of her voice.

The horrors of the situation had time to grow upon her, and she had been able to comprehend them in all their details. What if Louis were successful? He might escape, she had the money in her pocket, and he could leave France that very night. In that event she would be safe. Safe that is unless he chose to make demands upon her for the future, unless he required money too frequently, unless with an exaggerated conception of her wealth he insisted upon amounts she could not command.

And if unsuccessful! Doomed to a life separated from the man she loved, doomed and aged by her crime and its miscarriage, still in the power of Louis and known for what she was to Doctor Cold and Jeanne.

In either event her future was frightful!

Twenty times these thoughts rushed through her mind, she knew their truth, she saw the warning in every situation, and yet she could

not draw back, she would not, and she did not.

Suddenly from the growth of tall grass and brush that skirted the road she saw Louis spring over an intervening fence and hurry toward her. His face told of something dreadful, something uncanny and gruesome. She saw by his hard and set expression that he had accomplished his errand and left destruction behind him, and when she saw it she fell upon her knees and thanked Heaven for the permission to success.

In another moment Louis was with her, breathless, exhausted, his face as the face of a dead man, his legs trembling as they never trembled before.

She rained questions upon him and he answered not for some moments, then he told the whole story, how he had reached the house, sought the room, poisoned the milk, and then, of course, unconscious of the relationship, he told of the frightful death of the boy——

But he could go no further. Mrs. Sparks, with the cry of a wounded animal, flew at him, and with the mad and blinded fury of a brute she struck and clawed him until he fell to the ground with the suddenness and violence of the assault.

And then she fainted beside him.

Recovering himself in a few moments, Louis rose to his feet as quickly as his wounds permitted. The first object that met his eye was Doctor Cold, followed by a number of men running down the road two-thirds of a mile distant.

What to do he must decide quickly, and to secure the money Mrs. Sparks carried with her was the first necessity. He stooped and asked her for it; he told her those were approaching who would seize and imprison him, he told her he had followed her directions and he was not responsible for the mistake.

He looked and his pursuers were but a half mile from him !

But Mrs. Sparks refused, nay, more, she strove to arise and recumbent as she was she struggled to strike him a deadly blow. And Louis seized her by the throat, and with each demand for the money he clasped his fingers tighter. Then he searched beneath her dress for the little chamois bag containing the roll of bills, and when he tore it from its stitches leapt to his feet.

Mrs. Sparks lay motionless before him, and in the exultation of securing the prize he savagely kicked her lifeless form.

She was dead.

Louis ran to the bushes to find an outlet in the direction away from that whence the Doctor's party was coming, now only an eighth of a mile distant.

As he reached the undergrowth and was stooping to force a passage through it, he was stopped by a stern command and he looked down the muzzle of a rifle to two cold steady eyes at its stock. He made a dash to go.

around the weapon, when a report rang sharp on the air and when the Doctor reached the spot he found Louis stretched beside his employer.

THE END.

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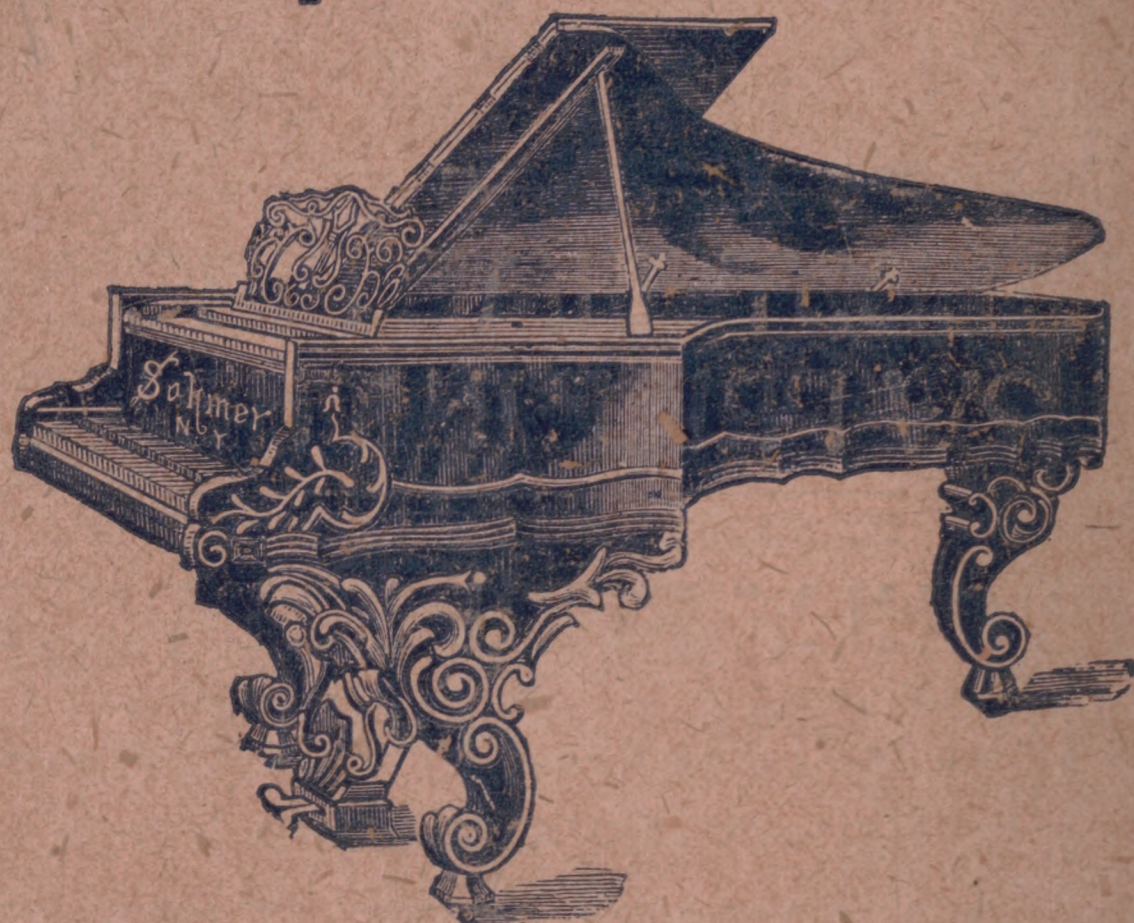
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